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## The New 'Arab Spring'

Governments are falling in North Africa again. The resulting storms could wreak havoc.

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To watch Middle East news is to feel a sense of déjà vu. Once again, hundreds of thousands are protesting in the streets of major cities. Once again, dictatorships are toppling. Once again, radical Islamists are waiting for their chance to exploit the chaos and uncertainty.

The Arab Spring in 2011 upended the Middle East and shook the world. Syria and Libya are still engulfed in civil wars sparked during that tumult. Europe's political structure is still shaking as the resulting mass migration has damaged mainstream parties and boosted new, often far-right groups. Russia continues to use the civil war in Syria to dramatically augment its power in the Middle East.

Now comes Arab Spring 2.0. Popular uprisings are destabilizing governments in North Africa. The resulting storms could create problems far beyond the region. The stakes are huge.

And once again, the outcome revolves around one critical country: Egypt.

## Algeria's Arab Spring

This time, the first flash point was in Algeria. Protests against dictator Abdelaziz Bouteflika began in February, after he announced he would stand for a fifth presidential term in April 18 elections. Bouteflika had governed as an authoritarian, but he is credited for bringing peace to the country and keeping radical Islamists out. However, he suffered a stroke in 2013 and is rarely seen in public. He is generally believed to be incapable of ruling. Algerians complained that they are being governed by a photograph or a ghost.

Angered by this charade of democracy, hundreds of thousands protested. On February 22, the capital, Algiers, saw its largest demonstrations in nearly 18 years. Protests have repeated every Friday since.

On April 2, Bouteflika resigned. But the protests continued. Bouteflika was little more than a figurehead. Those who stood behind him want to keep governing—but the protesters want them out too.

If the conflict destabilizes Algeria, the fallout could be staggering.

Algeria has walked this path before. The Council on Foreign Relations wrote that “the country is vulnerable to the same risk it faced in 1988, when it was rocked by unexpected (and still largely inexplicable) deadly and destabilizing riots” (March 7). These riots led to the so-called dark decade of the 1990s, where around 200,000 died as the country fought a civil war with radical Islamists.

Today, the Islamists remain a potent force. On Jan. 16, 2013, Algerian Islamists gained the world's attention when they seized a natural gas facility, taking hostage 700 Algerian workers and more than 100 foreigners.

“When Bouteflika goes, Algeria will probably implode,” warned Stephen Pollard at the *Spectator* in 2016. “The Islamists who have been kept at bay by his iron hand will exploit the vacuum. Tensions that have been buried since the civil war will reemerge. And then Europe could be overwhelmed by another great wave of refugees from North Africa.”

“An Algerian civil war would create huge numbers of refugees,” he continued. “One analyst told me he expects 10 to 15 million Algerians will try to leave. Given Algeria’s history, they would expect to be rescued by one nation: France. In its impact on the EU, even a fraction of this number would dwarf the effect of the Syrian civil war. Given the political trauma that the refugee crisis has already caused in Europe, a massive Algerian exodus could cause tremendous insecurity.” The resulting crisis, he warned, “could destroy the EU.”

Algeria is a huge country and an important supplier of oil and natural gas. If it destabilizes, the echoes will reverberate worldwide. Can Europe cope with yet another failed state at its borders?

The protesters know their country’s history. They know there are risks to toppling the government. Kamel Daoud, a columnist for an Algerian newspaper, told the *Atlantic*, “I have a lot of hope as an Algerian. I’m also very worried that the Islamists might steal our revolution, but I think we still need to try. [W]e need to take the risk” (March 29).

## War Criminal Under Siege

On April 11, another longtime African dictator fell: Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. He had been fending off protests since the end of 2018. Finally a sector of the army backed the protesters and forced the strongman out of office.

It’s easy to cheer his downfall. Bashir is the only sitting head of state indicted by the International Criminal Court for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Sudan’s strict Islamic law forced people to convert to Islam. Punishable offenses in Bashir’s Sudan included abandoning Islam, organizing protests, wearing perfume, men and women dancing together, teaching art and music, and consuming alcohol—even alcohol in medication.

And once again, the political void creates instability that Islamists can exploit. Sudan is ethnically and religiously divided. It has spent the last 30 years under Bashir, but has had more coup attempts than any other African country.

Islamists have much experience operating in Sudan. Bashir harbored Osama bin Laden from 1992 to 1996. He also forged strong links with Iran, allowing its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to set up bases in his country. Sudan was a transit point for Iranian weapons smuggling. Squeezed by economic problems, Bashir abandoned Iran in recent years and switched sides to Saudi Arabia. Sudan’s usefulness as a base for radical Islam has declined. The European Union gave him funds to stop and lock up migrants. But the terrorist and radical presence has not completely vanished.

Bashir’s departure and the resulting civil crisis could create a surge of refugees and open up a base for terrorists to attack targets in North and West Africa.

Already, splits are developing between the Sudanese Army and the protesters. With Sudan’s religious and ethnic divides, a spiral into worse violence is a real possibility.

## Civil War in Libya

Libya has been in chaos since the Arab Spring in 2011, but the chaos has been far less destructive than it could have been. Last year, around 1,500 people were killed in the fighting. That is tragic, but it is dwarfed by the 20,000 people killed in Syria and over 28,000 in Yemen over the same period.

Until April 4, the Libyan government was locked in a stalemate. The Government of National Accord (GNA) controls the capital Tripoli and is backed by the United Nations. But the Libyan National Army (LNA) under Gen. Khalifa Haftar controls most of the rest of the country and is backed by Russia, with support from France and some recognition from the United States. Meanwhile, terrorists, including the Islamic State, are exploiting the divided government and other weaknesses and are seizing territory.

But on April 4, Haftar marched on Tripoli. This power play threatens to unleash fighting on a whole new scale. The U.S. has withdrawn the small number of Marines it had posted in Tripoli. Haftar’s initial push failed to take the capital quickly, and the fighting has continued. About 400 people have been killed, and 50,000 have left their homes.

“The conflict in Libya has entered a new phase,” Stratfor warned shortly after Haftar’s attack. “With their forward progress halted, it’s unlikely that Haftar’s forces will be able to take full control of the capital any time soon, leading to a high probability that the battle will become a protracted affair. ... [W]ith Haftar’s forces stretched thin, rival militias and terrorist groups in the territory the LNA already had seized, such as in Benghazi, will have the opportunity to regain a foothold” (April 8).

“The chaos emerging from another full-scale conflict could allow the Islamic State to restrengthen as political crises continue in Algeria and Sudan,” Stratfor wrote.

## A Pattern of Instability

Major risks of conflagration lie elsewhere in Africa as well.

In Mali, nearly 90,000 have been forced to flee since January as tribal militia and armed groups clash in the country's northern and central regions. On March 23, more than 150 Fulani villagers were killed, probably by the rival Dogon tribe.

Meanwhile, the UN Refugee Agency said it is worried about the spike in attacks in southeast Niger, warning, "The beginning of the year has brought a resurgence of violent attacks by Boko Haram, targeting security and defense forces as well as the civilian population in the region of Diffa, near the Nigerian border." The Islamic State claimed to have killed 69 soldiers in the country between April 11 and 18.

Violence continues to simmer across the whole Sahel region. On April 18, Boko Haram terrorists destroyed a village in Cameroon and killed over a dozen people. Attacks like this happen regularly but seldom make big international news.

Further north, Tunisia has been the first Arab Spring's only success story. Under President Beji Caid Essebsi, the Tunisians kept the Islamists out—barely. But the country's economy has struggled, requiring a bailout from the International Monetary Fund with all the restrictions on spending that accompany it.

In the wake of Arab Spring 2.0, however, Essebsi announced that he would not stand for reelection after his presidency ends in the fall. His announcement came as movements on social media began to call for his ouster, inspired by events in neighboring Algeria. There are no clear candidates for replacing Essebsi, and his party has asked him to stay.

Tunisia's number two party is Ennahda, an Islamic party inspired by the Iranian Revolution and the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2016, it declared itself a party of "Muslim democrats." How the party would govern if it takes power is unknown. The results of the Arab Spring in just about every other country show there is plenty of scope for radical Islam in Tunisia.

Even in Turkey, strongman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is under threat. His political party performed badly in critical local elections on March 31. This is despite a massive crackdown in dissent in recent years and near total control of the media. "The strongman's future looks weak indeed," wrote *Deutsche Welle* (April 1). Erdoğan nullified the election results and insisted the vote be rescheduled. Such authoritarian heavy-handedness in the face of popular resistance could yield greater problems in the future.

The turmoil in all these areas will not dissipate quickly. Having several hot spots all smoldering at the same time increases the risk of broader revolution. But even if the present disorder settles down, the systemic problems will remain.

North Africa is on the brink of an explosion. Your Bible prophesies this explosion, as well as its ultimate outcome.

## Watch Egypt

In all this chaos, Egypt, which was arguably the center of the first Arab Spring, is now relatively quiet. But we expect this to change.

For two decades before 2011, *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry had forecast a "radical change in Egyptian politics." He said radical Islam, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, would likely take over Egypt. He said Egypt would then align with Iran, the biblically prophesied "king of the south" (Daniel 11:40).

For this prophecy to take place, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who was aligned with the United States, had to go.

This happened in 2011. Mass protests against his government grew and eventually toppled his regime.

Immediately afterward, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood turned the situation into victory at the ballot box. The group's leader, Mohamed Morsi, came to power the next year and installed the rule of political Islam in Egypt.

During his campaign for the presidency, Morsi stated, "The Koran is our constitution, the prophet is our leader, jihad is our path, and death in the name of Allah is our goal." Egypt's new trajectory was clear.

Straightaway, the Iranian-Egyptian relationship began warming. It had been frozen for decades because Iran disagreed with Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, and Egypt rejected Iran's descent into clerical rule. But for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the two countries opened offices in each other's capitals. Commercial flights resumed between the two nations. And photographs of Morsi and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad embracing showed the world the establishment of an alliance.

Bible prophecy indicates that Iran's control of Egypt will act as the gateway to Iran's dominance of North Africa, and it was starting to happen before our eyes.

However, in 2013, just one year later, the Muslim Brotherhood leader was gone, as was the Iranian-Egyptian alliance. Morsi's push toward religious rule rattled the military, and he was promptly removed in a coup. He was dethroned by Gen. Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, whose power and distrust of the Muslim Brotherhood are similar to those of former President Mubarak.

Egypt's move into Iran's camp has been delayed until a future time.

Has that time arrived? Events of early 2019 show that another “radical change” in Egyptian politics is coming.

It is hard to tell, given Sisi’s clampdown on freedom of the press, but so far, there appears to be no substantial movement by the Egyptian people toward ousting the president. Commentators, however, are starting to notice an increase in Iran’s efforts to ally with the Muslim Brotherhood. Iranian affairs analyst Tamer Badawi noted that Iran is seeking to capitalize on North African turmoil. And Iran knows the value of Egypt.

In an interview with Carnegie Middle East Center, Badawi said: “This topic [Iran’s relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood] is important because the Middle East and North Africa region today is defined politically by volatile alliances arising in response to specific situations. Despite how vulnerable and relatively unpopular the Muslim Brotherhood has become, it remains an integral part of the region’s social fabric, with an extensive network of contacts .... As the region is potentially witnessing a second wave of uprisings—in Algeria and Sudan—movements of political Islam may make a comeback and contribute to new governing structures. *Iran would be interested in approaching such groups and cultivating good relations with them*” (April 15; emphasis added throughout).

The Muslim Brotherhood seems weak with Sisi in power. But Egyptian politics can change extremely fast, as we witnessed in 2011. According to Badawi, Iran is already reaching out to several factions of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Iran intends to “tap into the movement’s extensive network of regional contacts,” he said.

According to Badawi, Iran will try to use its outreach with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to influence other destabilized nations in North Africa. Unsurprisingly, this is exactly what the Bible says will happen.

Based on a prophecy in Daniel 11:40-44, Mr. Flurry has said that Egypt’s alliance with Iran will lead to Iranian control over the destabilized areas of North Africa.

“We need to understand the ENORMOUS IMPACT that *Egypt working with Iran* will have in the Middle East and even globally,” he wrote. “This Iran-Egypt axis is going to change the game in the Middle East—*particularly in Libya and Ethiopia*” (*Trumpet*, October-November 2012).

Right now, we see major popular movements across North Africa bringing down governments, as in 2011. But instead of just focusing on the turmoil in Algeria, Libya and Sudan, we also need to watch Egypt. It has a population larger than Algeria, Sudan and Libya combined. It is one of the leading nations in the volatile region.

“The emphasis here in [Daniel 11] verses 42 and 43 is on Egypt—then we have Libya and Ethiopia,” wrote Mr. Flurry. “This shows that *Egypt is the big conquest!* It is the *real* power behind Libya and Ethiopia, which suggests that *it is going to have a heavy hand in swinging those two nations into the Iranian camp*. ... Put simply, this means that we can expect Egypt—with Iran’s help—to lead Libya and Ethiopia into the Iranian camp!” (ibid).

As in 2011, it might be the civil unrest in neighboring countries that motivates Egyptians to rise up against their strong leader. However it happens, Egypt is the pivotal nation to watch.

## A Clash of Civilizations

Daniel 11 prophesies a clash between two power blocs, a European “king of the north” and a radical Islamic “king of the south.” Though Egypt has not yet swung into the Islamic camp, conditions for this clash are still building.

In his article “Watch Algeria!”, Mr. Flurry wrote: “Northern Africa is turning into a battleground with enormously important prophetic implications” (*Trumpet*, April 2013).

His article described the 2013 terrorist attack on the Algerian natural gas facility. “These terrorists are sponsored, for the most part, by Iran,” he wrote. “Iran has designs on being the strongest power throughout the region, and is extending its reach throughout North Africa.

“But Iran isn’t the only one interested in Africa. Germany is making strong inroads as well. Both of these powers are racing to get as much control of North Africa as they can. They will inevitably clash with each other.”

Arab Spring 2.0 had been building for years. Bouteflika especially has been sick for a long time, and it has been clear that a handover of power was inevitable. The potential for Libya to explode again has also long been known. So has the opportunity this could give the Islamists.

Algeria’s military has been preparing for a clash. It increased its weapons imports by 55 percent over the last five years. Despite being a relatively poor country, it is the world’s fifth-biggest weapons importer. It is Germany’s largest arms customer outside of NATO. It is making sure it has the necessary armaments to take on the Islamists.

In that 2013 article, Mr. Flurry described the spread of radical Islam backed by Iran. But he wrote that the radicals “are beginning to face some opposition from Germany and the European Union. Algeria has a strong supporter in Germany. That is going to make a big difference for these terrorist groups.”

Algeria is Europe’s third-largest gas supplier. Spain depends on Algeria for half of its natural gas needs. “Do you think

Germany will sit back and do nothing while terrorists take over Algeria?" asked Mr. Flurry. "I think you're going to find Algeria getting a lot of help from Europe, especially Germany. With all that fuel coming from Algeria, you know Europe and Germany must be very concerned."

Mr. Flurry forecast in that 2013 article that Europe and radical Islam would increasingly clash in North Africa. The EU now has major military missions in Mali and the Central African Republic, and it is trying to organize a local force comprised of allied African nations to fight radical Islam. And the need for more intervention in North Africa is clearly intensifying.

Those clashes portend a major event prophesied in your Bible. "The Daniel 11:40 clash between the king of the south and the king of the north is about to be fulfilled!" Mr. Flurry concluded. "All of this violence in Africa is just a prelude to the fulfillment of this prophecy.

"Monitor these events closely and see if what we're telling you doesn't come to pass. So many prophecies already have. *Never in mankind's history* has so much prophecy been fulfilled so rapidly! Events are racing along. This is not the world you knew 10 or even five years ago. It's very different" (ibid).

Both sides are already preparing for this clash. There are only a few pieces left to fall into place. Clearly, Bible prophecy is unfolding in North Africa.

Understanding these prophecies is not enough. God doesn't give prophetic insight to titillate our curiosity or just for the sake of knowledge. In fact, there is a danger to understanding these prophecies and not acting on them (James 1:22).

These prophecies reveal the power of God. They show us, without a doubt, that the Bible is His Word. They also remind us that although this is not His world, God does rule in the kingdom of men (2 Corinthians 4:4; Daniel 4:17). Finally, these prophecies help you prove that the work of Mr. Flurry and the *Trumpet* is more than just a work of men. ■