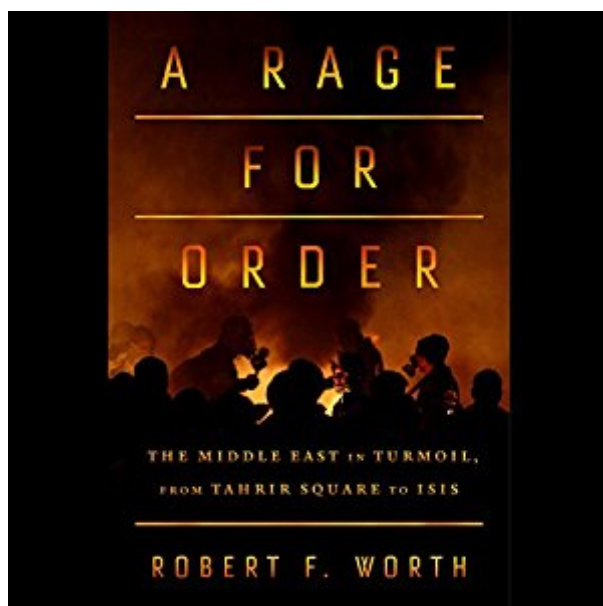


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# A Rage For Order: The Middle East In Turmoil, From Tahrir Square To ISIS



## Synopsis

The definitive work of literary journalism on the Arab Spring and its troubled aftermath. In 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. With an introduction read by the author.

## 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. Pettitt'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.

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."

It's hard to say that you actually "like" this book, since it's so depressing. We've read 5 or 6 books in the last year or so on the Middle East, for my book club, and they're all pretty depressing, but this one especially. This book focuses on individual relationships within the overall "Arab Spring" timeframe -- two close friends who grew up together in Syria, close relationships formed within the promise of Tahrir Square, etc. He describes the relationships before, during and after the Arab Spring events; in each case, where there were early strong bonds (as in the case of the Syrian friends), or where bonds developed during the street events, these bonds devolved into partisanship, sectarianism, and downright hatred, to the extent that former "friends" were often fighting each other. The one thing that comes out clearly in this book (as in other recent books on the Middle East) is that these hatreds, whether derived from tribalism or religious sectarianism, are way beyond our understanding and ability to influence (other than negatively). The idea of bringing our sort of democracy to this part of the world is both naive and counter-productive. The book is well-written and researched -- it's clear that the author has spent a lot of time in these countries and spends a lot of it on the street, in cafes and in general, learning to know the people.

I thought this book was easy to read, doing an excellent job of breaking down the events so it was easy to comprehend. The personal stories helped to give insight into the various perspectives. I would have liked the author to include a profile or two or someone who didn't have a political leaning to understand what it is like for those "caught in the middle" who are not motivated by political leanings...I suppose I was looking for a profile that might better represent the refugees. Over half my book club didn't read this book this month claiming it was "too much like a text book". I didn't find

that to be true. I knew the geography of the Middle East, had a basic understanding of the differences between Shiites and Sunnis and had a high level understanding of the differences between Persians and Arabs. I also did an occasional search on google if there was a term I didn't understand. I would definitely read more from this author.

A gripping book about the Arab Spring and its aftermath, illustrating these regional dynamics through the lives of individuals. The main impressions I'm left with are (1) that the region is a quite a mess, not because of the citizens but because of the way the citizens are buffeted and brutalized by forces beyond their control, (2) the U.S. makes it messier no matter what we do, and we can't make it better by the way we've been going under Bush, Obama, or anything on offer right now. Wish I knew what the answer was.

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