



NOW THAT THE ARAB SPRING IS OVER WHAT DOES THE SUMMER HAVE IN STORE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

POLITICAL ISLAM

In Tunisia without the ex-President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali the first free elections were held and the results showed that through the democratic process the people – well 40% of the votes, but significantly more than the others – selected Ennahda. Ennahda was a once outlawed group who will be labelled as an ‘Islamist’ party by Western political scientists.

In fact most of the opposition to Arab dictatorships has been by groups who are based on Islamic principles. Therefore, any future elections in other countries in which dictators have been toppled could be replaced by political parties based on Islamic principles – for instance Egypt where it is predicted that the Muslim Brotherhood will be successful in the November elections.

However there are many in the West who will have a problem with these changes as Tunisia is adding to the existing presence of Islamic Politics within the Middle East. Turkey has had the AK Party in charge since 2002; similarly Hamas were victorious in 2006 when it was least expected. Additionally, the Islamic Dawa Party in Iraq with the support of some Shiite parties has governed since the toppling of the secular dictator Saddam Hussein. We will have to wait and see what transpires now that Muammar Ghaddafi is dead and the war in Libya is largely over.

This seems to show that the people of these countries have spoken which is what democracy is about, but rather than look at the West as a way to be governed they are exploring the relatively new process of applying Islam within the political spheres of the 21st century.

The West have a role to play in this, but not like it has over the last century or so which is to manipulate situations to their own advantage but rather to fulfil the desires of the peoples of these countries who as Muslims would wish to apply Islamic principles. Arguably the Muslim world is going through a huge shift where people are finally finding their freedoms and the opportunity, to live their lives as they choose, within their grasp – something we take for granted living in the West. Our job in the West is to support them along the way rather than preach or dictate to them.

We have had our revolutions, social and political instabilities but we found our destinies without the interference from foreign states or bodies. We sometimes walked down dead-ends and sometimes we went through very dark places – but that was the collective experience and knowledge which was needed in order to then make the right decisions. Many of us who are parents feel we know what’s best for our teenage children, but there are times when we have to let them be as it is the parent which the teenager is rebelling against in the first place in order to declare their independence and determine their identity in no longer being just your child, but an individual. In other words they want to find their destinies not the destinies we have dreamt or wished for them.

It is now time to allow another people to also find their own destinies – even if they are not to our liking - for our principles must always win over our desires.