

A Stupid And Banal Editorial In The Boston Globe About Tunisia

The editorial's banality is reflected in its title: "Tunisia, A Beacon Of Hope."

Nothing in the *Globe* editorial educates readers about the special circumstances that explain the tenuous Tunisian hold on peace and democratic succession. [I've mentioned it here a dozen times](#): the reasons are that Tunisia was in the iron grip of Habib Bourguiba, a convinced secularist, a North-African version, in his way, of Ataturk, who with his supporters in the Destour Party created the conditions, in the first four decades of Tunisia's independence, that would allow for the secular class to rule, to impose its will, and to create a sufficient enlargement of that class so that, when the personal corruption of Ben Ali and his extended nuclear-fallout family became too much, the secular class itself remained, and managed to re-take, through elections, power. The primitives of En Nahda may have to be held in check by force, and the secular class will no doubt be sufficiently scared by what is happening in Libya to be willing to do so – then the limits of that Tunisian exceptionalism will be understood.

The main point, the point that the writer(s) of this editorial, and all others who have commented on Tunisia have overlooked as they note the Tunisian Exception but fail to make the slightest effort to explain it, is the role of France, and the French language. The Tunisian elites know French, read French newspapers, can watch French television, visit France, study in France, have children who study in France. And this has had a tremendous effect. Tunisia is the land where half the country wants to be French, and the other

half wants to be Saudi. So far, the half that wants to be French has retained control, and it benefits not only from the legacy of Bourguiba, but from continuing to be open to the Western, advanced world, through the French language. This is not something that the officials in Paris who run the organization devoted to encouraging links with francophone countries ("La Francophonie") are likely to say openly. They can't. It would appear to be condescending. But privately, educated French people – and the most advanced of the Tunisians – surely recognize what access to the non-Muslim world, the Western world, through the widespread use of French in Tunisia, has accomplished. It's the mission civilisatrice on display, it's the great triumph of Voltaire and Vauvenargues, and a hundred others, over the stultifying texts of Islam.

Not a word or hint of this in this "Tunisia – Beacon Of Hope" editorial.

Once upon a time *The Boston Globe* had a writer who went under the name "Uncle Dudley." His real name was Lucien Price. He wrote, based on his own notes, "Conversations with Alfred North Whitehead." John Henry, deep-pocked new owner of *The Boston Globe*, ought to look for a few lucien-prices. They might be right under his nose.