

DEBATE

INDIA AND TURMOIL IN THE ARAB WORLD

The “turmoil”, popularly termed as the “Arab Spring”, which started in Tunisia and led to a quick exit of the country’s unpopular leader, gave rise to hope amongst others in the Arab world. The dramatic events were further fuelled by on-line activism through social network sites. Egypt was the next to be set aflame. Encouraged by these events, in a few other places – like Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Morocco, Libya, etc. – activists initiated demonstrations, hoping for similar reforms. The Egyptian President was brought down but the expected domino effect stalled there for some time.

In both these cases, one decisive factor was that the armed forces refused to take sides and thus ensured that the popular will could win the day.

The Bahraini protests (that had a sectarian colour) were of a different nature. These were crushed, with the connivance (and assistance) of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and acquiescence of the Americans – taking the larger Middle East politics (and the oil factor) into account. The Iranian angle also contributed to the GCC action and the tacit support from the West. American and Western interest in ensuring stability in the Gulf kingdoms played an important part. It was now clear that this “Spring” would not engulf the GCC member states – though the rulers extended massive concessions, mainly monetary and some political, to ward off serious unrest.

The only two non-GCC monarchies, Jordan and Morocco, who were otherwise not seriously affected, were offered GCC membership – thus signalling that any disturbance there would be dealt with as done in the case of Bahrain. It also signalled the formalization of the unique club of all Arab monarchies with a determination to oppose, by any means, change of regimes.

Yemen (adjoining the GCC – and an associate for some aspects of economic cooperation) was a different case. The GCC and the West were seriously worried that instability there would have far-reaching repercussions – especially in the security sphere, with the Islamic fundamentalists having a sizeable presence there. However, the tribal aspect of the problem and the inflexibility of President Saleh have further complicated the issues.

The unrest in Syria has seen the Assad regime using disproportionate force to crush the protests.

Libya has been the bloodiest so far, as not only did the protest take a tribal colour, the de facto fracturing of the country into two parts, the bloody force used by Gaddafi to retain power, the R2P (Responsibility to Protect) principle being invoked by the West to intervene militarily, have led to an untenable situation with no end in sight.

India has deep connections with and interests in the region. On the recent turmoil in the Arab world, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in an interaction with some editors on 29 June 2011, said that this was an area of “acute concern”. He recalled that there are “60 lakh” Indians working there and India sources “two-thirds of its oil supplies” from there.

The remittances from these expatriates are also a factor, both economically as well as a social factor in some Indian states. India has always had excellent relations with all the regimes – based on the basic principle of dealing with the regime in power and not commenting on internal systems.

India “facilitated” the exit of Indians from Egypt, “evacuated” its nationals from Libya and has “advised” its nationals in Yemen to leave. It has been very cautious in its official pronouncements and has taken calculated steps to ensure the safety of its citizens – that is paramount – and also its other interests.

Where will this “spring” lead to? What should India do? Has it done what it needed to or does it need to do more? Should it have reacted differently?

Indian Foreign Affairs Journal posed these questions to four eminent scholars and policy practitioners.

K. P. Fabian, Former Ambassador of India notes:

March Towards Democracy will be Slow and Asymptotic

While the dawn of democracy in the Arab world might still be far away, the regimes under threat are unlikely to recover their legitimacy in full. ... What is in store for the Arab world? A slow, asymptotic march towards democracy? It is easier to mobilize people to get rid of an autocrat. It is less easy to mobilize them for establishing democracy. The unity of purpose vanishes as soon the autocrat goes.

P. R. Kumaraswamy, Professor at the Centre for West Asian Studies in the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, says:

A Painful Path to Democratization

While not being a party to the unfolding drama, India is not a disinterested party. Whatever happens in the Middle East will have far-reaching

implications for India and influence its economic growth... But one thing is for sure: For the Arab rulers and the masses alike status quo is no longer an option

Rumel Dahiya, Advisor, Military Affairs Cluster, at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, states:

India Should Help in Restoring Peace and Stability in the Region

There will be major changes in politics and governance across the region. India should be prepared to do business with existing or incoming regimes and assist them in ways that help restore peace and stability in the region, which is of vital importance to it.

Sameena Hameed, Assistant Professor at the India Arab Cultural Centre, Jamia Milia Islamia, says:

India Needs to Move from ‘Mild’ to the ‘Middle’

Post-Arab spring, India’s trajectory in the Arab world will not suffer any reverses due to its current positions but may lose the potential momentum, as these nations will look for reliable partners for their reconstruction and political consolidation, when other powers may readily move in. A middle path is consistent with India’s interest and image than a mild one.

March Towards Democracy will be Slow and Asymptotic

K. P. Fabian*

There are two noteworthy special characteristics of the Arab Uprising. One, there is no Lenin, Voltaire or Rousseau. It has been mostly spontaneous. The people, angry, frustrated, and determined, took leave of their fear of oppressive governments and rose up. Two, the world in general, the West in particular, was caught napping. France, the former colonial power in Tunisia, was taken by surprise. Even after the Tunisian people sent out clear and loud signals, Paris continued to express support to President Ben Ali through Foreign Minister Michele Alliot-Marie who, for that reason, lost her job. She had even offered French “military expertise” to put down the revolt in Tunisia.

Similarly, in the case of Egypt, when the protests began and gathered momentum, Washington was surprised. The failure of the Central Intelligence Agency to predict the unrest in Tunisia and Egypt dominated the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing. At one point, Committee Chair Senator Dianne Feinstein said the CIA should have had more warning of the revolts, since demonstrators were using the Internet and social media to coordinate, in many cases publicly. “Was someone looking at what was going on the Internet?” she wondered.

Why did Paris, Washington, and others make such an error of judgment? What is intriguing is that there were reasonably clear signals for years that the status quo in the Arab world could not continue for long. Since 2002, the UN has been publishing Arab Human Development Reports. These reports are different from the usual UN reports prepared by experts. The UN wanted the reports to serve as an advocacy tool for change. The reports were written by Arabs. The 2002 Report pointed out the importance of according full respect for human rights and freedoms as the cornerstone for good governance. For twenty-five years from 1980 the region witnessed hardly any economic growth. Real per capita income grew by 6.4 per cent in twenty-four years. The youth bulge (under 25) works out to 60 per cent. The median age is 22 years as compared to 25 for the world as a whole. The State is often the main threat to human security. Civil society is suppressed or barely tolerated by the State. Unemployment is running at 14.4 per cent as compared to the global rate of 6.3 per cent. Unemployment among the youth is much higher. Democracy is conspicuous by its absence and fraudulent elections are held

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one after another.

The main reason why the West assumed the perpetuation of the status quo is that it wanted “stability” at any cost, as Condoleezza Rice put it. In a speech at the American University in Cairo, she said, “For 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region, here in the Middle East, and we achieved neither.” That speech was delivered in 2005 when she was Secretary of State. But there has been no change since then in US policy of seeking stability at the expense of democracy. President Obama made an eloquent speech at the Cairo University in 2009 in support of democracy. That speech was seen by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee as one more argument in favour of awarding him the Prize. But there was no follow-up on this pro-democracy approach. Later, when President Mubarak visited Washington, Egypt’s transition to democracy was not on the agenda. The unwritten pact with Egypt was that the US would go on supporting and giving aid – US\$ 60 billion in thirty years – and in return Cairo would support US interests in the region: peace and engagement with Israel.

Apart from self-interest, the decision-makers in the West had another reason to believe that status quo would survive for a long time. They were following the conventional wisdom in regard to Islam and the Middle East. Francis Fukuyama wrote, “Islam is the only cultural system that regularly seems to produce people like Osama bin Laden who reject modernity lock, stock and barrel” (*The Guardian*, 10 November 2001). The implication is that since democracy is part of modernity, Islam is inimical towards democracy. Similarly, Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations* argued that Islam is a barrier to the spread of democracy. It has been further argued that having had neither a Renaissance nor a Reformation as in the West, Islamic society is not historically prepared for the onset of democracy.

Such arguments of Western intellectuals do not stand scrutiny. The argument about Renaissance and Reformation shows what Toynbee called the fallacy of rectilinear propagation of history: it assumes that non-Western societies have to go through the same stages as the West did. Obviously, this is egocentric illusion. Incidentally, the Renaissance would not have occurred if Islam had not preserved the works of Aristotle, Plato, Ptolemy and others. The Indian decimal system was introduced to Europe by Leonardo Fibonacci who got it from the Arabs. Science and mathematics would not have made much progress without that system. In any case, when the Iranians tried to establish democracy in the early 1950s it was the US and the UK that foiled that venture. Nor was the democratically elected Hamas government in Gaza (2007) permitted to function by Israel and its Western allies.

What are the causes of the Arab Uprising? First and foremost, the people wanted a change of rulers. Egypt had three rulers in sixty years. Tunisia had two in fifty years. Gaddafi took power in Libya in 1969. Yemen's President Saleh has been in office for thirty years. Syria has had two rulers for more than forty years. As Lord Acton said, power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The rulers stole from the wealth of the State. The people watched helplessly. They could not speak out in protest unless they were prepared to be arrested and tortured. In Egypt, at the site of any demonstration of protest, there were more policemen than protestors. After the events of 11 September 2001, many of the regimes joined President Bush's GWOT (Global War on Terrorism) with alacrity, partly to gain US money and arms, and partly to frighten and suppress dissent.

It is most important to understand that at some point of time, the people lost their fear of the rulers and the state apparatus of suppression. We still do not know exactly how that happened. The beginning was in Tunis. On 17 December 2010, Tareq al-Tayyib Muhammad Bouazizi, 26, set himself on fire. He was a street vendor earning \$140 a month with a large family to support. He was insulted by a woman municipal official and when he went to the mayor's office to complain the mayor refused to see him. Bouazizi left saying that he would kill himself. He came back with a can of petrol and in front of the mayor's office he set himself on fire. He was rushed to hospital, and later to a better hospital. President Ben Ali visited him in hospital. But the protests that started on 17 December gathered momentum fast. The police fired on protestors and the protests got bigger. Bouazizi died on 4 January 2011. Ten days later, President Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia with his family and a ton-and-a-half of gold.

France wanted to make amends for its support to Ben Ali and the Mayor of Paris announced that a square in Paris would be named after Bouazizi. However, Bouazizi's fame as martyr came under scrutiny soon and even in his home town his martyrdom is contested. This is because his family accepted money from President Ben Ali and is living in a better house. There is one more twist. Soon after Bouazizi's attempt at self-immolation, another young man with an identical name filled the cyberspace with revolutionary messages and songs. Many thought that it was the other Bouazizi. That cyber activity helped in a big way to mobilize protestors.

Ben Ali was much admired in the West. He vigorously promoted privatization. The Boston Consulting Group in a survey of Africa praised Tunisia as a "Lion of Africa". In its 2010 Tunisia Review, the IMF endorsed Ben Ali's policies of "enhancing its (Tunisia's) business environment and

improving the competitiveness of its economy.” The President’s wife, Leila, was active in the social sector. Her Basma Association helped handicapped children. Her foundation SAIDA took care of cancer patients. She was President of the Arab Women’s Organization, actively promoting women’s empowerment.

But there was another side to Leila’s activities as reported by the US Ambassador, which was “wikileaks”.

Ben Ali’s wife, Leila Ben Ali, and her extended family – the Trabelsis – provoke the greatest ire from Tunisians. Along with the numerous allegations of Trabelsi corruption are often barbs about their lack of education, low social status, and conspicuous consumption. While some of the complaints about the Trabelsi clan seem to emanate from a disdain for their nouveau riche inclinations, Tunisians also argue that the Trabelsis’ strong arm tactics and flagrant abuse of the system make them easy to hate. Leila’s brother Belhassen Trabelsi is the most notorious family member and is rumored to have been involved in a wide range of corrupt schemes from the recent Banque de Tunisie board shakeup to property expropriation and extortion of bribes. Leaving the question of their progenitor aside, Belhassen Trabelsi’s holdings are extensive and include an airline, several hotels, one of Tunisia’s two private radio stations, car assembly plants, Ford distribution, a real estate development company, and the list goes on. Yet, Belhassen is only one of Leila’s ten known siblings, each with their own children. Among this large extended family, Leila’s brother Moncef and nephew Imed are also particularly important economic actors.

Many in Tunisia knew about the flourishing crony capitalism but were scared to speak out. It is rather strange that the international media with its reputation for vigorous investigative journalism left Ben Ali’s crony capitalism alone. Is it because Tunisia was praised by the IMF and Ben Ali was an ally of the West?

If Tunisians expected that with the hated Ben Ali gone the country would march smartly towards democracy, little did they know what was in store for them. There is a plan to elect a constituent assembly by October 2011. No timeframe for the election of a parliament or president has been indicated. Ninety political parties have emerged. En-Nahad is an Islamist Party that was banned by Ben Ali. It is back and it is expected to get around 25 per cent votes. The other day there was a protest by young people in front of the Interior Ministry. The protestors wanted women to have the choice to wear the hijab while being photographed for their identity card. Obviously, such a request is unusual for Tunisia and shows the growing influence of en-Nahad.

The economy continues to be in trouble and with the fall in tourist arrivals the employment situation has deteriorated. Tunisia has 3.6 million internet users out of a population of 10.4 million. For Tunisians, making Ben Ali flee was the easier part. Democracy is still an aspiration of the people not fully shared by Ben Ali's successors. But Tunisia has the advantage of a comparatively high literacy level, 77 per cent, in the region. Ben Ali's political party, RCD (Rally for Constitutional Democracy), was banned in February 2011. It is not possible to say now how soon Tunisia will emerge as a democracy. But the prospects are not bad and it is a long road.

The revolutionary virus spread from Tunisia to Egypt. Some Egyptians even carried Tunisian flags to Tahrir Square. But it took a while. Once again, the West did not fully expect it. On 17 January 2011, the BBC reported, "If Tunisia is to be the first of a series of dominos, the first of many Arab autocracies to collapse, there is no sign yet of the contagion spreading to Egypt." That very day there was one self-immolation. On 25 January, coinciding with the National Police Day, the first major demonstration occurred. The next day the government shut down the internet. The demonstrations were peaceful partly because of the influence of Professor Gene Sharp of the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. He is a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and Henry David Thoreau. He has written extensively on non-violent struggle. His writings were distributed at Tahrir Square. The government was disappointed that the demonstrations were non-violent. The police used violence against the demonstrators. They released criminals from jails. Fridays saw the demonstrations peak. On 10 February, Mubarak addressed the nation and handed over some powers to Vice President Suleiman. But the people wanted Mubarak to resign. On 11 February, the Vice President announced that Mubarak had resigned. We have to note the role of the army. The army decided that it was time for Mubarak to go and told him so. The US too did play a pivotal role by signalling that it was time for Mubarak to leave.

There was much more global interest in Egypt than in Tunisia, for understandable reasons. Saudi Arabia and Israel had the same approach. Both wanted Mubarak to remain. Both found fault with Obama for not supporting Mubarak. Saudi Arabia offered to make up the loss, if any, of US aid to Mubarak.

Just as in Tunisia, there was no immediate dawn of democracy in Egypt too. The army succeeded Mubarak. The army is ambivalent about democracy. The only well-organized political party with cadre is the Islamic Brotherhood. Under Mubarak it was not free to engage in political activities. It was established in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. After the fall of Mubarak, it has floated a new party by the name Freedom and Justice Party (FJP).

Will Egypt make progress towards becoming a democracy after the poll that might take place in October/November 2011, if it is not postponed? What are the intentions of the army? The army was the instrument used by Mubarak to deny democracy to the people. Can the same army be a good midwife to assist in the birth of democracy? The signals are not encouraging. The people of Egypt have started demonstrating again, this time against the army. They are upset that the security forces that killed hundreds of peaceful demonstrators remain unpunished. Under pressure, the government has announced that 700 police officers would be sacked. The army has started sending out signals that in view of the likely success of FJP it might be necessary for the army to assign to itself the role of protector of the nation, as in Turkey.

Assuming that an election will be held and held fairly, will it throw up a few responsible political parties with a clear agenda, able and willing to cooperate to give a stable government and a reliable and responsible opposition? Much will also depend on the FJP. It has signalled that it is coming out of its narrow Islamic limitations and trying to be a normal, progressive political party. Is such signalling part of a plan to capture power and then use the power to impose an Islamic agenda?

The new finance minister, Samir Radwan, negotiated a standby credit with the IMF. But the people opposed any deal with the IMF, which is seen as a supporter of the hated Mubarak regime. Radwan had to forgo the deal. The financial situation is perilous. Foreign exchange reserves are only \$3 billion. Exports are falling. There are fewer tourists. Industrial production has fallen by 50 per cent. The finance minister himself is taking a salary of \$300 a month. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have given some relief. Mubarak family's wealth has been estimated at \$40–70 billion. Even a quarter of that will take care of Egypt's financial worries. But the banks and other more shadowy entities that hold the money might not cooperate with much alacrity.

What are the geopolitical implications of Mubarak's fall? As we have seen, Israel and Saudi Arabia unrealistically wanted Mubarak to remain in power. Post-Mubarak Egypt has permitted Iran to send two naval vessels through the Suez Canal, for the first time since 1979. Sameh Fahmy, the former minister who signed a gas deal with Israel, is being proceeded against. He sold gas at below the market price, causing a loss of \$714 million. Mubarak acted as a co-jailor of the Palestinians in Gaza. This has changed. Egypt has reopened the border with Gaza. It was closed in 2007 when Hamas won the election and formed the government in Gaza. There might not be any formal revocation of the 1981 peace treaty with Israel, but the cosy relationship that Israel enjoyed with Mubarak for thirty years has ended. The army might try

up to a point to resist a radical change in policy toward Israel, but much will depend on the post-election political situation.

It is to be noted that Israel has the option to agree to a Palestinian state and live in peace with its neighbours. There is no serious intention on the part of Arabs to invade Israel. They know that it is beyond their military capacity to win a war against Israel. Whether Israel will exercise the sane option available to it or not depends primarily on Israel and secondarily on the US.

Another question that the post-election government will have to deal with is sharing of water. Under a 1928 treaty made under the auspices of Britain, Egypt gets veto over any other state's new plans to use the water of the Nile. The river originates in Lake Victoria in Uganda. There are ten riparian states. Kenya, Ethiopia and others hold that the treaty of the colonial era should be revised. In 2003 Kenya announced that it would denounce the treaty and tension mounted between the two countries. Indications are that Egypt will now take a less obdurate line.

We may note that Ben Ali fled eighteen days after the attempted self-immolation of Bouazizi. Mubarak resigned seventeen days after the protests started in a big way. Gaddafi was watching from Libya. He came to the conclusion that force should be used right from the beginning and that too without any restraint. Major protests calling for an end to Gaddafi's regime broke out in Benghazi on 15 February, four days after Mubarak fell, as the people expressed their anger over the arrest of human rights activist Fathi Terbil. The demonstration was peaceful, but police resorted to violence, and that caused more demonstrations. In less than a fortnight, Gaddafi lost control of Benghazi. A National Transition Council was established in Benghazi and civil war ensued.

Gaddafi had military advantage over the rebels. His air force bombed the rebels. On 26 February by Resolution 1970 the Security Council imposed an arms embargo, froze assets, and referred the matter of suppression of demonstrations to the International Criminal Court of Justice. The resolution did not impact much on the ground situation and Gaddafi's forces continued their advance.

France and the UK took the initiative to move another resolution (1973) for stronger action. Russia and China opposed the move, but they decided to abstain rather than use their veto. India, Brazil and Germany also abstained, to show their opposition to the suppression in Libya. The resolution, passed with ten votes in favour, imposed a no-fly zone over Libya. Strictly, a no-fly zone means no flights. But the intention of the UK, France and the US was to

stop all flights by Gaddafi's forces and at the same time authorize flights by others "to protect the civilians". Rather convoluted language was used in the resolution but it is obvious that those who abstained knew what was intended.

Shortly after the resolution was passed, France, the UK and the US started bombing Gaddafi's forces. They argued that it was necessary to do so in order to protect civilians. But it was not a united NATO action. Germany and a few others did not support any military action by NATO, but they decided not to stand in the way of NATO's taking control of the operation. There was some expectation in Benghazi and elsewhere that by resorting to air action for a few weeks NATO would compel Gaddafi to enter into talks, paving the way for his exit. Gaddafi has shown much more resilience and defiance than his foes anticipated. His youngest son was killed in NATO bombing. At the time of writing, there is militarily more or less a stalemate, but the situation can change to the advantage of Benghazi. There is no prospect of either side's imposing its will on the other through military means. Gaddafi has been weakened by defections and sanctions. There are shortages, but since Gaddafi does not permit the international media into Libya it is difficult to know the true situation.

While NATO bombing might or might not put an end to Gaddafi's hold on power, there is another development that should be of serious concern to him. That is the growing international support and diplomatic recognition for the rebels in Benghazi who style themselves as the Libyan Republic. The NATO bombing will only prevent him from recapturing the east. His hold on the west, though weakened by defections and sanctions, is still strong. The Contact Group on Libya had its fourth meeting in Istanbul in the third week of July 2011. The Group was formed in March.

The US has now recognized the Benghazi regime as the "legitimate governing authority". Libya's frozen assets in the US amount to \$31 billion. Benghazi might get a part of it, or a credit line with the frozen assets serving as collateral. Italy is arranging for such a credit of Euro 400 million. Turkey is arranging similarly for \$100 million. All told, it is difficult to see Gaddafi lasting for long. Of course, NATO is disunited, governments are short of money, and popular support for a long-drawn-out military involvement is absent. Yet it has to be noted that Libya is virtually divided into two. France has started giving military aid to Benghazi. It will be surprising if France, the UK and the US do not finish the job they have begun. But we should note, in passing, the general allergy in the West to military action and Obama's own difficulties with Congress. China has established contacts with Benghazi. Either Libya will remain divided or Gaddafi will go. There was a meeting

between Gaddafi's representatives and US diplomats. His talking to the US that has asked him publicly to leave is a sign of his growing weakness.

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad too was watching the events and he too reached Gaddafi's conclusion: use force, without restraint, and early enough. On 26 January 2011, there was a self-immolation in al-Hasakah in the north-east. Popular protests spread. The State responded with violence against unarmed crowds. The protests spread even more. Assad used tanks against his own people. He cut electricity and water to the areas of protests. The government has claimed that 120 security men were killed by armed protestors in Jisr al-Shugour. The claim has been disputed. Nobody denies that security men were killed. The rebels claim that because some army unit did not want to fire on protestors they were fired upon by other units. Whatever the truth, thousands fled to Turkey.

There is no immediate prospect of Assad's fall from power. In a population of 21 million, Sunnis are 74 per cent, Alawites – a Shia sect – 10 per cent, and Christians form 10 per cent. The Alawites dominate in the government and, to a slightly lesser extent, in business too. Such domination by a minority cannot last. Yet the protest against the regime has not so far gathered critical mass. Many Syrians are worried about civil war and chaos if Assad is pushed out. Russia is a committed supporter of the regime. No serious action at the Security Council is expected. Whether he survives or not, Syria will take a long time to settle down to normalcy. It is estimated that at least 1300 have been killed so far. This may be compared to 846 killed in Egypt, which has four times the population of Syria.

Paucity of space does not permit us to cover Yemen properly. A provisional government has been formed. GCC had worked out an agreement for President Saleh to go, but he did not honour that agreement. Seriously hurt by an attack, he rushed to Saudi Arabia for treatment. Saleh is expected by most observers to go sooner or later. Meanwhile, he has introduced an inter-tribal dimension to the conflict to postpone his departure.

There have also been major protests in Bahrain, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and Oman. Saudi Arabia sent troops to Bahrain to put down the revolt. But the situation is far from normal.

What are the implications for India? It is futile to argue that it is easier for India to deal with dictators who do not lose any election. Two of them are gone and the third seems to be on the way out. Reflection shows that India should not have any difficulty in establishing meaningful relations with Arab democracies as and when they emerge. It is to be noted that all the permanent

members of the Security Council are in contact with the regime in Benghazi. India too should establish contact, if it has not already done so. While the dawn of democracy in the Arab world might still be far away, the regimes under threat are unlikely to recover their legitimacy in full.

What is in store for the Arab world? A slow, asymptotic march towards democracy? It is easier to mobilize people to get rid of an autocrat. It is less easy to mobilize them for establishing democracy. The unity of purpose vanishes as soon the autocrat goes. To paraphrase Mathew Arnold, the Arabs find themselves between a world already dead and another powerless as yet to be born. Western democracy is only a particular form of democracy. There is no universal form of democracy. Let us hope that the Arab genius will beget a form of democracy compatible with the conditions of their world. Yet, we cannot be sure.

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A Painful Path to Democratization

P. R. Kumaraswamy*

Regicide. That was how an astute long-time observer described the developments in the Middle East. Under popular pressure, the rulers of Tunisia and Egypt were forced to resign office they had held for long. Has anything changed in those two countries and other parts of the Arab world? The answer depends upon a number of conditions and caveats. It is, however, undeniable that the unfolding developments have not only captured widespread international attention but also become an inspiration for the marginalized and faceless millions across the Middle East and beyond. Indeed, with the sole exception of Qatar, with its highest per capita income in the world, no country in the Middle East is free from the Arab Spring.

While not being a party to the unfolding drama, India is not a disinterested party. Whatever happens in the Middle East will have far-reaching implications for India and influence its economic growth. How does the Arab Spring appear from India or what are its major flavours?

Common Features

Despite the diversity and country-specific conditions, it is possible to identify certain broad trends which are prevalent in the popular unrest that is sweeping from Morocco to Yemen.

- Democratic deficit is widespread in the Arab world. The legitimacy of Arab rulers is being challenged; they have clung on to power without any transparent means of legitimacy. This has become untenable in the wake of the Arab Spring.
- Problems of governance are widespread in the Middle East. Presidential and parliamentary elections, though frequent, are nothing but a farce. There is little difference between government and the ruling party. Meaningful political opposition does not exist in the Arab world.
- The ruling elites have distanced themselves from the public and are unable to recognize, let alone meet, the aspirations of the population. Youth constitute a majority in many Arab countries and the establishment is unable to comprehend the aspirations of the educated but unemployed youth.

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- Globalization, economic liberalization and wealth creation have not benefited the wider population but has resulted in crony capitalism. The regimes, republican and monarchical alike, have been accused of corruption, misuse of office and public funds. Family members of the rulers have been identified as the principal beneficiaries of the liberalization. For example, while fleeing to Saudi Arabia, Ben Ali and family reportedly carried over a hundred suitcases filled with cash, jewellery and other wealth. In return for dropping formal charges, Suzanne Mubarak admitted her role in ill-gotten wealth and agreed to return it. Prince Sultan, the Saudi Crown Prince and Defence Minister since 1963, has often been accused of benefiting from large defence deals.
- There is widespread discontent and disapproval among the Arab masses. The prolonged protests in different Arab countries are a sign of frustration as well as the absence of fear. Intimidation, which ensured regime survival, has proved ineffective before unarmed and peaceful demonstrators.

Instability

Six months after Mohammed Bouazizi, a marginalized vegetable vendor, set himself ablaze in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia, there are concerns that the Arab Spring is running out of steam and lacks a clear direction and purpose. Initially, the absence of a clearly defined political goal, recognizable leadership and ideology were seen as advantages of the popular uprising. Gradually, these are proving to be a liability if meaningful changes are to be brought about.

The unpopularity of many Arab rulers cannot be denied. Many rarely went out of their golden cages. Diverse groups, organizations and a political individuals joined hands with the sole aim of removing the incumbent. Tahrir Square symbolized this popular discontent and defiance. Many openly argued that anyone would be better than Mubarak, Ben Ali, Assad, Qaddafi, etc. The Day After, however, is proving to be more chaotic and unpredictable.

What happened in Tunisia and Egypt cannot be termed regime change, as the resignations of Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak were not followed by any systemic change. Both countries are still under those who were closely associated with the erstwhile rulers. While Egypt held a referendum on 19 March 2011 to approve changes in the constitution, the dates for the presidential and parliamentary elections remain uncertain. Tunisia has shifted its presidential election from 24 July 2011 to 23 October 2011.

The situation in other countries is far worse. The rulers of Libya, Syria

and Yemen rejected popular calls for reforms and responded with brutal force. Their decision to stay on and fight for survival has plunged these countries into large-scale violence. Driven by tribal and sectarian loyalties, these rulers have dragged their countries into a virtual civil war.

Economic deprivation took a sectarian turn in Bahrain where the Shias feel left out of the political process and economic benefits. This forced external military intervention in the form of Saudi-dominated GCC troops into the island. Other monarchies are only relatively better. Both rich and poor Arab monarchies tried to mollify public opinion through financial incentives or cosmetic changes. Some bribed their citizens through subsidies and aid packages; others reiterated their pledge for political reforms. The street pressures were so overwhelming that even the competing Palestinian groups Fatah and Hamas decided to bury the hatchet and seek reconciliation.

So far, however, no Arab country or ruler has come out with a plan that would satisfy at least the majority. While it is not possible to satisfy every segment of the population, widely acceptable changes have not taken place. The concessions were too little, too late. Mubarak's belated pledge that he would not seek re-election intensified public calls for his resignation. Bashar Assad's decision to suspend the emergency rule led to calls for his removal. Likewise, the Jordanian opposition has been increasingly sceptical about King Abdullah's willingness and ability to bring about significant political reforms. Tahrir Square has become a new symbol of the Egyptian opposition to the lethargy of the post-Mubarak rulers to bring about the necessary changes.

Far from bringing about democracy, the Arab Spring has made the region extremely unstable. This will continue for a considerable period of time.

Cleavages

The internal cleavages in the region have not received adequate attention. The marginalization also has a sectarian angle. The prolonged neglect of Shias in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia has significantly contributed to some of the internal tensions in these countries. The Christian-Muslim unity exhibited at Tahrir Square proved to be short-lived and was overshadowed by renewed violence against the minority Coptic Christians.

One could notice similar tensions in Jordan where the Bedouin, who are the backbone of the Hashemite Kingdom, have complained of their marginalization compared to Jordanians of Palestinian origin. Until now, such complaints came from the Palestinians, who accused King Hussein and King Abdullah of limiting their political power through gerrymandering of

constituencies. Similarly, the presence of non-Bahraini and in some cases non-Arab personnel in the military has fuelled the unrest in the island kingdom.

These differences and complaints are not new. Some of them have been prevalent since the days these countries were created or became independent. Authoritarian rulers managed to keep the lid and these problems remained manageable, if not resolved. The political instability has revived these issues and hampered the ability of the rulers, old and new, to handle them.

Rulers Rally Around

The Spring has evoked a mixed reaction in the Arab world. As a rule, most rulers have rallied around their beleaguered brethren. They fear that removal of one ruler due to public protests would be contagious and would spread to others. In this, monarchs are as vulnerable as republican regimes. Some were more vocal and public than others. Despite widespread public protests in Egypt, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia chose to openly endorse Mubarak and urged for his continuation. This was preceded by his decision to provide refuge to the disgraced Tunisian ruler Ben Ali and his family. Saudi mediation efforts in Yemen, likewise, include its willingness to offer asylum to President Abdullah Saleh. The GCC's decision to militarily intervene in Bahrain in defence of the beleaguered Sunni-minority al-Khalifa family is another manifestation of the trend. The timing of the decision to invite Jordan and far-off Morocco to join the GCC should be linked to political unrest in this region. Growing political contacts between Riyadh and Amman should also be seen within the context of the prolonged unrest in the Hashemite Kingdom.

At the same time, there were also cases when Arab rulers sided with the masses. The case in point is Libya. Moving away from its perennially lethargic and ineffective mould, the Arab League recognized the brutality unleashed against the civilian population in Libya and called for an UN-enforced no-fly zone. This eventually led to the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1973. Subsequently, when the Western powers used this to launch a military campaign against Libya, the Arab world was represented by the symbolic contributions from Qatar and the UAE.

Anti-Western

Like many protests in recent years, there is a degree of anti-Americanism in the Arab Spring. Washington's prolonged backing of the dictatorships was deeply resented by the masses and, conscious of this, President Barack Obama sought to distance himself and his Administration from the unpopular erstwhile

friends. Despite the absence of any visible manifestations, anti-Americanism was seen as a common feature of the Arab Spring. The mass protests happening only in countries closer to the US or against pro-Western Arab rulers strengthened such an interpretation. Capitalizing on this, President Assad publicly attributed the absence of such protests in Syria to his following "pro-people" policies. The surfacing of public protests in Syria in mid-March, however, dented the anti-Americanism argument.

Similarly, some have harped on the anti-Israel component of the protests at Tahrir Square. Mubarak, who never paid an official visit to Israel except for a brief trip to attend the funeral of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995, did strengthen the vital interests of Israel. Despite the cold peace and periodic wrangling, Israel was better off under Mubarak. The prolonged siege of the Gaza Strip would not be possible without the active participation and cooperation of Egypt. Some of the measures taken by the post-Mubarak military council gave an indication that the new rulers were determined to move away from the past. Egypt's willingness to allow the passage of Iranian warships through the Suez Canal, to facilitate the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation, the opening of the Rafah crossing and the repeated sabotage and disruption of gas supplies to Israel gave credence to the anti-Israeli argument. Likewise, on 5 June 2011 Syria allowed the Palestinian protestors to clash with Israeli soldiers along the Israel-Syria 1973 ceasefire line on the Golan Heights.

Except for these two countries, however, the Arab street against their rulers had no Israeli angle. Even in Egypt protests took an anti-Israeli turn only after the resignation of Mubarak. Hence, the anti-Western component is marginal in the Arab Spring and should not be overemphasized.

Military Domination

The Arab rulers were depicted as dictators partly due to their dependency upon the military for survival. Whether they had a military background or not, their survival rested heavily on their ability to rely on the unquestionable support and loyalty of the military. Even monarchs at times rest on the military to consolidate their hold. For long, Abdullah warded off internal challenges within al-Saud largely due to his position as the commander of the powerful National Guard that comprised primarily of tribes. This was more so for the republican regimes. In a way, the military has become the source of strength, legitimacy and power base of Arab rulers.

The pre-eminence of the military came to the forefront when the army switched its loyalty and sided with the protesting public. The removal of the

rulers of Tunisia and Egypt was made possible when the army decided to switch its loyalty and made the continuation of the rulers untenable. The absence of such a change of allegiance proved critical for the rulers of Libya, Yemen and Syria not only to continue in office but also to unleash violence against the protestors.

The change of leadership in Tunisia and Egypt did not weaken the role of the military. In the past, the military stayed behind the scene but now it has no such pretensions, and in both countries the military occupies the central stage following the regicide. There are no indications that the military is prepared to transfer power to the civilian authorities anytime soon. Since elections are a precondition for power transfer, delays in the electoral process mean prolongation of the military rule. There are suggestions that some of the Arab countries would emulate the erstwhile Turkish model where the military would play the role of guarantor of stability and constitutionality and pave the way for a smooth transition to democracy.

Lack of Institutions

Public protests in Tunisia lasted for twenty-eight days while the Egyptian public needed only eighteen days to force Mubarak's resignation. Such a prolonged agitation in the heart of the capital and other parts of the country would have paralysed even the most efficient administration and would have weakened even the most well-established institutions. However, the Arab Spring has exposed the absence of institutions.

Having been used to one-party rule for decades, most Arab countries lack credible political institutions which could shoulder responsible governance. The authoritarian nature of the Arab countries not only meant single-party/leader domination but also the absence of credible legislative, executive and judicial institutions. There were sparse differences between the ruling party and different organs of the State. Independence of judiciary is not the norm and accountability was rarely demanded of the Arab governments.

With the exception of Kuwait, the Arab parliaments are just a sham. Even if the military is prepared to relinquish power, the political arrangements are not in place. The Muslim Brotherhood, the only organized political party in Egypt, was banned since 1954 and efforts by others to start political parties as an alternative to the ruling NDP were throttled by Mubarak. Hence, even if the military were to hold elections, there were not many political parties, groups or leaders to capitalize. For the same reasons, Tunisia also deferred elections by three months to 23 October 2011.

Costs of the Spring

The Arab Spring, which began in early January in Tunisia, has already lasted for over six months and has spread to almost the entire Middle East. Scores of public protests, demonstrations, work stoppages and other forms of dissent have been reported in many countries. Civil war conditions prevail in Libya, Yemen and Syria while the cleavages are widening in Bahrain. It is impossible to estimate the cost of the Arab Spring but certain broad inferences can be made. First and foremost, normal life as it was understood for decades, has ceased. The daily routine of millions of Arab citizens has been disrupted. Though most of protests have been peaceful, the economic cost of the protests would be substantial. Then there is the human cost where scores of people have been killed or injured during the demonstrations. The unrest has led to a significant drop in production and has dented the tourism industry, vital for the economies of Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan. As the Jordanian Finance Minister Mohammed Abu Hammour told an Arab Banking Conference in Rome in June, the unrest has resulted in the flight of \$500 million per week from the region. In places like Egypt, the unrest has further eroded the ability of the ordinary people to cope with the economic downturn.

While richer countries such as Saudi Arabia have sought to bail themselves out through economic largesse, the less privileged ones have increased their external dependency. Oman and Bahrain were offered a \$10 billion aid package by the GCC while G-7 pledged \$20-40 billion aid to the beleaguered countries.

Stability

For long, both the countries of the Middle East and their outside patrons played on the security dimension. In return for the political support, the Arab rulers promised and, to a large extent "maintained" internal stability. Driven by larger national interest calculations, their patrons also sidestepped serious issues such as legitimacy, governance, human rights, democracy and the rights of women and minorities. The national security concerns became more pronounced in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the US. It is essential to remember that not just the West, but others also preferred Arab stability over sensitive human rights issues.

To some extent, the Arab Spring exposed the hollowness of the argument. Stability cannot be sustained if the vast majority of the citizens are unhappy, discontented and opposed to rulers who lack legitimacy, accountability and governance. This resulted in the West shifting its stand vis-à-vis its erstwhile friends, allies and clients in the Arab world and slowly siding with the Arab

street. Even while retaining national interest calculations, the West recognized that its long-term interests would be served better by espousing the cause of the Arab public than continuing its proximity with the discredited rulers. This trend was more visible in North Africa than in the Persian Gulf region.

The stability argument did not disappear altogether, however. The beleaguered Arab rulers sought to harp on the "After-me-the-deluge" argument of Louis XV. Mubarak personified this trend when he unsuccessfully suggested that Egypt would plunge into chaos and anarchy if he were to leave office. A similar rationale has resulted in the others digging in and fighting for survival. The determination of al Khalifa to adopt an uncompromising position towards the Shia opposition and the Saudi backing of this intransigency underline the power of the stability argument. Despite its public distancing from the Saudi-backed military intervention and close military relations, the options of the Obama Administration were limited. Likewise, the critical role played by the Saleh government in the fight against al-Qaida has prevented the US from calling for a regime change in Yemen.

The real power of the stability plank is most palpable in Syria. Not just the regime but also its friends and critics alike abhor the prospects of Assad following the footsteps of Ben Ali and fleeing the country. Given the minority nature of the Alawite regime, to which President Assad belongs, his stay within Syria after relinquishing office does not look bright. Despite widespread public protests and the suspected large-scale civilian deaths, the US has been extremely cautious in demanding that Assad leave office. The kid-glove treatment meted out to Assad has to be seen within the wider Middle Eastern context. Despite its past animosity and difficulties, the US could not ignore the role that Syria plays in developments in Lebanon, Iran, Iraq and the Palestinian affairs. Any sudden change of leadership in Damascus would have cascading effects upon the stability of Lebanon and the prospects of an Arab-Israel peace in the Middle East. The signs of such possibilities came to the forefront when Syrian-based Palestinian refugees marked al-Nakba (meaning catastrophe, marking the anniversary of the formation of Israel on 14 May 1948) by trying to cross the Israel-Syria ceasefire lines on the Golan Heights. This border has remained calm since October 1973 largely because Damascus ensured tranquillity. Hence, even those who dismissed the possibility of the Muslim Brotherhood taking over post-Mubarak Egypt flagged the Islamist card while defending the actions of Assad vis-à-vis dissent. In short, if Mubarak was a tyrant and pharaoh, Assad is a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism!

External Role

The Arab Spring could not escape external interventions. The usual suspects, the US and Israel, were conspicuous by their absence. If one excludes the military action in Libya, the Western powers were not active in joining the Arab masses. There were isolated incidents of suspected Western agents and provocateurs in protests in Syria. This, however, is not the case with others. The Islamic Republic of Iran is seen by many Arab countries, rulers and neutral commentators as an active and interested player in some of the Arab dissents. Through its public statements and interventionist posture, Iran has shown its preference, if not involvement, in the events in Egypt and Bahrain. Its interests are clear. For long, Mubarak refused to respond positively to its diplomatic overtures and even had the temerity to arrest a Hezbollah cell in his country.

The Shia majority population of Bahrain gave Iran a legitimate reason to involve in the affairs of the island kingdom. Before long, Bahrain became a turf war for Iran and Saudi Arabia to further their interests; one in support of the Shia protestors and the other in defence of the beleaguered Sunni-minority rulers. The Iranian leaders and officials, who were vociferous in expressing their support for the people of Tahrir Square, adopted a deafening silence over similar dissent in Syria. Joining hands with the Syrian regime, Iran accused the West for the problems in Syria. The same holds true for Hezbollah. Hasan Nasrallah's criticism of Mubarak was followed by his strong defence of Assad. Interestingly, even Palestinian groups based in Damascus, such as Hamas, were not as loyal and vociferous as the Hezbollah in defending Assad on this issue.

Indeed, Turkey appears to be the only Middle Eastern country to have consistently adopted a pro-people posture on the Arab Spring. Having urged Mubarak to "listen" to the voice of the people, its leaders adopted a similar posture towards Assad, especially after Syrian refugees started fleeing their country and sought refuge in Turkey. Israel's position has been wobbling. At one level, it was constrained to support Mubarak who ensured its interests and, hence, its leaders openly endorsed his continuation. Popular disapproval eventually forced Israel and its leaders to accept the inevitable. The same approach can be discerned over Syria. Though seeing the Assad regime as hostile and adversarial, Israeli leaders expect that post-Assad Syria would be unstable and unpredictable and hence, Assad is less of an evil than another.

Conclusion

The importance of the Middle Eastern region to India cannot be overstated. For centuries, India has had close economic, cultural and trade links with the region. Over time, this historic relationship has acquired a politico-strategic dimension. Issues such as growing commercial ties, energy security and political concerns vis-à-vis Pakistan have made the Middle East vital for India. The region remains India's largest trading partner and supplies about 60 per cent of India's hydrocarbon imports. With close to six million expatriate labourers, the Middle East, especially the Persian Gulf region, has acquired socio-economic importance. Of late, the region is seen as a potential stakeholder in India's massive infrastructure plans. Hence, India and its leaders could not remain indifferent to the Arab Spring.

While the erstwhile authoritarianism and absolutist rule may no longer be possible, it would be naïve to expect that the Middle East will undergo a metamorphosis. There would undoubtedly be changes, greater openness, increased transparency, enhanced governance and increased popular participation. Even these changes would not be uniform and/or happen immediately. But the process would be on and the governments, especially the ruling elites, would be monitored more closely by the ruled.

It is essential to recognize, admit and, wherever possible, support the democratic aspirations of the Arab population. The path to democracy, however, will be long, painful and agonizing. Arab rulers could be brought down by protests but institution building would be a lot more difficult and would take decades. The defiant public has forced the Arab rulers to begin the second phase of nation-building. Despite the euphoria, there will not be an easy way out.

The old ways of authoritarian rule will no longer be possible. Both monarchs and republican rulers would have to accept certain limits to their power and would have to submit themselves to greater public scrutiny. Governance and accountability would become an integral part of the Arab public discourse. Political survival would be subjected to constitutional redefinition of the powers, responsibilities and tenures. Such changes will not, however, be uniform or immediate and will depend largely upon country specificity as well as the ruler's foresight. But one thing is for sure: For the Arab rulers and the masses alike status quo is no longer an option!



India Should Help in Restoring Peace and Stability in the Region

Rumel Dahiya*

The Arab Spring will be remembered in history as a major phenomenon for several reasons. It has spanned a large geographic area almost simultaneously, has dramatically demonstrated the power of peaceful mass movements in overthrowing dictatorial regimes and highlighted the importance of technology in bringing people together. The Arab Spring may not have the potential to democratize the whole Arab world immediately, but it has set the region on the path to eventual democratization.

The response of the regime, role of the military and outside powers, organization and reach of political parties and civil society organizations, past precedents, the people's tolerance of political violence and their revolutionary spirit will make for different trajectories in different countries. The regimes in Tunisia and Egypt have fallen; Libya appears to be next in line. Yemen at present seems like a hopeless case, with or without change of regime. Syria is a tough call to make and the monarchies are likely to survive for now because of the flexibility allowed by their political structures. But removing the autocrats may prove to be the easier part. Turning the revolt into revolution will be harder. That will require creation of new institutions and a new political culture. These tasks will be difficult due to the absence of experienced political figures to guide the revolution. There is no guarantee that the transition will be smooth or that the conditions which gave birth to the revolt will change.

The conditions for revolution in the Arab world have existed for a long time. The people in most Arab states have faced common problems like economic deprivation, unemployment aggravated by the youth bulge, poor governance and nepotism, lack of any perspectives for change and denial of political rights. Hardly anyone could forecast that those conditions would lead to a widespread popular unrest engulfing states from Morocco to Bahrain. No one could foresee seemingly powerful presidents like Hosni Mubarak and Ben Ali being swept away so swiftly and others like Muammar Qaddafi, Bashar al-Assad and Abdullah Saleh fighting for the survival of their regimes. Some of the Arab countries have experienced civil war or large-scale demonstrations in the past but such events did not affect other countries in the region. But

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this time it has been different. Use of technology, particularly the social media, seems to have made the difference.

The Arabs have a long tradition of a majlis system wherein the people get together informally and discuss social and political issues. Such a system was restricted in its geographic reach due to intertribal differences and absence of communications. The spread of cheap communication technology removed these barriers. It enabled the people to organize and spread their messages across political and geographic boundaries in real time. It was the combination of pre-existing conditions for unrest and an enabling environment created by technology that gave rise to regional uprisings. Their timing and the rapidity with which they spread still surprised the people. Some would term it as a political contagion analogous to the financial contagion that afflicted East Asia in the 1990s. Since the financial markets were connected, the crisis spread rapidly. Now the social media have connected the people with similar political grievances and economic hardships and the movement has spread across the region.

It is noteworthy that the uprising in all the affected countries has been internally focused. In most places the agitators wished to change their economic, social and political conditions. Their wish list was limited to improvements in governance, social justice and freedom of expression, human rights and improvement of their economic conditions. They were asking for employment, political reforms, transparency and dignity. Change of regime was not the objective when the agitations started. It is only when the regimes tried to suppress the movement by employing disproportionate force that the demand for regime change surfaced. The revolutions lacked organization, experienced leadership and external support. The regimes had no experience of dealing with leaderless but spontaneous, secular and sustained mass demonstrations by unarmed youth, raising absolutely genuine demands, in the full glare of the media. They were no longer dealing with terrorists or armed gangs bent upon overthrowing the regime who could be tackled by the full military might of the State. The world has also changed. There is less tolerance for human rights violations. Repression alone could not have saved the regimes. The autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt were overthrown quickly. Other regimes have either bought time by taking some mitigating measures or are struggling to survive.

Most of the demands of the protestors are similar to those made in more advanced countries. But in democratic countries such demands are negotiated and settled through institutions. Arab countries lack such institutions and the opposition is not geared for collective bargaining. Since the regimes have not

addressed these demands and have used force to suppress expression the issue has become politicized. In countries where such demands have been addressed the situation has not gone beyond control. In countries like Libya and Yemen, the regimes tried to play on the fears of the international community by projecting the threat of al Qaeda hijacking the movement. Such protestations, however, had little effect on the international community since al Qaeda was marginal to the uprising and has already lost much ground in the Arab world, with the exception of Yemen where it posed a threat even otherwise. This threat did provide an excuse for President Saleh to hang on to power even after he lost support and credibility within the army and his own party.

The response of most of the states affected by major uprisings has generally been similar: use of force against agitators; suppression of media; promise of political reforms and some economic inducements, in varying measures. Morocco has gone the farthest by holding a referendum on political reforms. Most of the Gulf countries have increased food subsidies and wages and made cash payments to their citizens to contain the fallout of the uprisings in the rest of the Arab world. In Kuwait the government has handed over about \$15,000 per person in three instalments beginning March 2011. Oman has promised to raise the salaries of its nationals working in the private sector. Saudi Arabia has also distributed money, raised salaries and provided subsidies on food items. Governments in the Emirates have also started taking measures to assess the people's needs and address them. That perhaps explains the absence of mass protests in the Gulf countries with the exception of Bahrain, where the majority Shia population feels politically and economically sidelined. But these are short-term economic measures. The people will start demanding a share of political power once their economic condition improves. Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and Libya have been the most affected after Tunisia and Egypt.

Bahrain has managed to suppress the uprising by giving it a sectarian colour and with external support from Saudi Arabia. But the fundamental political, social and economic problems remain. Bahrain is not so rich as to be able to bribe its way through the turmoil nor is there a political will to address the socio-political grievances of the majority Shia population. Suppression of the movement by force is therefore the default option for Bahrain. The ruling family is fearful of losing power to the Shia majority and other Gulf monarchies are equally uneasy about democracy setting in. Iran, although mired in political infighting, weighs heavily in the calculations of the GCC member states and of the West. As long as Saudi Arabia remains stable and the USA sides with it, no change is likely in Bahrain.

The Syrian regime has become equally unpopular because of brutal suppression of the agitation. Bashar al Assad missed an opportunity to salvage his regime by not initiating reforms when the movement was restricted to a few towns and the demands of the protestors were modest. By using disproportionate force against the agitators he has helped sustain the momentum. He has survived so far because his support base has remained intact. The army, the Baath party and minorities consisting of Alawis and Christians have continued to support him. Besides, the opposition is not unified and the protestors are not organized in a particular physical space. The external powers have refrained from intervening directly since they are not sure what post-Assad Syria will look like. Russia and China oppose any foreign intervention. Saudi Arabia, although not a great friend of Assad due to Syria's close ties with Iran, is not supportive of the uprising out of the calculation that a Sunni-led democratic transformation across the border may create a climate of change in Saudi Arabia itself. In fact, the Syrian protestors themselves are opposed to any outside intervention. There is no viable alternative political formation which can assume power once the Assad regime collapses. However, Assad may be making a serious miscalculation. His support base is narrow and the defiance against his regime is growing. The regime is fragile because of internal pulls and pressures. Once Qaddafi is removed, the protestors in Syria will be emboldened and the army and security services will be stretched to their limit. In case violence flares up in large parts of the country simultaneously, the Syrian army – comprising a large number of conscripts – may refuse to obey orders. In that case, the balance will decisively tilt towards the movement and the regime is likely to collapse. However, given the heterogeneity of Syrian society and the military power at the command of the regime, there are chances that ethnic conflict followed by violent collapse of the regime may be the outcome. Irrespective of what trajectory it follows and how much time it takes, it is likely that there will be a regime change in Syria unless major political changes are ushered in immediately.

The Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh has refused to step down despite being removed from the scene due to serious injuries sustained during the bombing of his palace. He has lost the support of his army and also of his own party. It is safe to assume that he is forced to stay away from Sana'a, because his backers realize that his continuation is no more tenable and putting him back in saddle will not be in their interest. The opposition is not united and the situation in Yemen is chaotic, with no one in charge. Backroom manoeuvring appears to be going on to find a leader or a leadership council that can take most of the political parties on board and confront al Qaeda in

the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Houthis. Saudi Arabia is unlikely to agree to the Houthis being part of the governing setup, but keeping them out may not be easy. Restoring peace in Yemen will be rather difficult particularly since the polity is deeply fractured and no external power has any leverage with all the contending parties. Moving out of Saleh to Riyadh for treatment brought the temperature down a little but the situation is highly unstable and civil war in coming months is a distinct possibility. The AQAP is likely to gain in strength. The “spring” in Yemen is likely to turn into a prolonged hot summer.

Libya is a separate case altogether. Colonel Qaddafi has never been anybody’s favourite. Despite many European and other countries having strong economic interests in Libya, most countries would like him to go. He did not serve his cause by using harsh words and disproportionate force against the protestors. The scale of violence unleashed and the number of protestors killed forced the international community to intervene militarily in support of the rebels under the umbrella of the nebulous framework of Right to Protect (R2P). Despite the stalemate, mainly due to force asymmetry between the regime and the rebels, it is only a matter of time before Qaddafi is forced out of power. He is currently fighting an existential battle for survival. There are indications that Qaddafi is willing to negotiate with the rebels but the morale of Qaddafi’s forces has held so far. If no defections take place and the army remains loyal to Qaddafi then the fight may continue for months, if not longer.

With the exception of Bahrain, monarchies have fared better in managing the protests. Part of the reason is that monarchs can create and abolish political or administrative structures, cede authority to elected representatives or younger members of their family and take quick decisions. This gives an impression of change and part of the blame gets diverted to elected bodies. But the main reason is that monarchies tend to lay down clear red lines on what and how much to accept and there is no confusion about the measures to be adopted.

Currently there is a stalemate in the situation in the region. The protests continue but not much headway is being made in changing the situation on the ground. There is a possibility that fatigue might set in. Some regimes might buy temporary peace by initiating economic and political measures. Only major events like large-scale defections by key figures or extreme violence or foreign intervention may change the situation dramatically. However, the likelihood of external intervention is currently limited because of the overstretch of the Western powers and the unwillingness of others. The process of democratization across the region may have to wait for the future. A

demonstrable change for the better in the countries where regimes have changed may have a long-term effect on other countries.

The response of the military has been a major variable in deciding the outcome of the people's movement. In countries where the army continues to support the regime the autocrats have managed to survive. Syria is a case in point. Ben Ali was unpopular with the Tunisian army and he depended mainly on French-trained and -equipped police and intelligence services for his survival. The army refused to suppress the revolution and Ben Ali had no choice but to leave. Similarly, the Egyptian army refused to participate in suppression of the revolution and Mubarak had to go. Some people believe that Mubarak had the full backing of the Egyptian army. They fail to understand that Hosni Mubarak lost his legitimacy within the armed forces once it became clear in the late 1990s that he was planning a dynastic succession and that he was just waiting for his younger son Gamal to gain acceptability in the National Democratic Party. This move was never popular in the army since Gamal maintained a coterie of self-serving kleptocrats around him. Even senior military officers were kept divided and under watch by the other security agencies. They were afraid of being fired. The spontaneous public uprising afforded an opportunity for the army to ease Mubarak out and earn public goodwill.

Political revolutions have taken place in Eastern Europe and ex-Soviet republics in the last two decades and some similarities can be observed between them and the Arab revolutions. Eastern Europe had a role model in the form of European Union. These countries had functional institutions and structures which made transition easy. Experienced political leaders were also available to lead the popular movements. As a result, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and other East European countries were transformed into progressive democratic states. On the other hand the ex-Soviet republics, all communist states to begin with, have remained politically, socially and economically backward despite the "colour" revolutions sweeping them in last ten years or so. With the exception of Kazakhstan and to some extent Azerbaijan, which are richly endowed with natural resources, all other ex-Soviet republics are suffering from economic stagnation. Revolutions have failed to remove the democracy deficit or improve the human rights record in these countries. Most of the Arab countries rank far below Ukraine, Georgia or Azerbaijan in political and social indicators.

Since the institutional capacity of the Arab states is even poorer than that of the ex-Soviet republics it can easily be surmised that the democratic revolution underway in the Arab world will neither have a uniform impact all across the region nor will the democratic transformation be smooth or speedy.

A large number of young people are getting exposed to higher education and a large number of educational institutions are coming up in the region, particularly in the Gulf. However, the numbers are still small and it will take some time before the educated lot becomes part of the decision-making process. These people will help in developing the societies and economies but they would also expect greater freedoms.

The overall report card of the uprisings in the Arab world is bound to be mixed but the region would have been fundamentally changed. The idea that a popular non-violent movement can overthrow a regime would have sunk in. The rulers will find it hard to ignore popular sentiments. However, change of regime will not bring about immediate relief to the people or political stability in any of the countries. Competitive politics will be divisive and economic conditions for the people harsher for a few years. Governments may change suddenly and frequently before the gains of the revolution are consolidated. The path will be uncertain and perhaps long but change will be a certainty.

The external powers have followed different policies for different countries. Their response is couched in the language that suits them. Whereas intervention in Libya is justified in terms of humanitarian necessity, the lack of a strong reaction to repression in Bahrain is explained in terms of pragmatic necessity. While most of the democratic countries are generally supportive of democracy and human rights and make the right noises, yet protecting one's national interests comes first. Some countries like Turkey have been shifting their position. Turkey was not critical of Qaddafi till its citizens were evacuated; but subsequently joined the NATO forces in enforcing the naval blockade and supporting the rebels. That was crass opportunism. Of course, no power can be seen to be supporting violence against unarmed people agitating for their political or economic rights. The question before them is how to support democracy in the region where the existing regimes have been by and large friendly, or if the turmoil creates serious strategic, economic and social disruptions? There is apprehension in some quarters that the Islamists, taking advantage of being best organized, will benefit from the turmoil and come to power in countries where the regimes have fallen. These fears may be exaggerated since in none of the countries where autocratic regimes have been overthrown over the last three decades, such as Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines and Kyrgyzstan, have parties with extremist ideology come to power.

The turmoil in the Arab world has not changed the geo-politics of the region since the revolution has been focused on internal issues. However, with the onset of democracy popular opinion will force the incoming regimes

to realign their foreign policies. The uncertainty over the behaviour and policies of the new regimes make foreign powers anxious. Even Iran, which is supporting the movement in countries aligned with the West, is projecting it as a religious phenomenon and an expression of anger against foreign domination of the region. Mindful of its own political fragility Iran is not supporting the democratic aspirations of the people. Although it would like to exploit the situation for power projection in the region, it lacks capacity to do so.

India has viewed the turmoil in the Arab world with concern. It has deep connections with and interests in the region. India has good relations with most of the regimes in the Arab world. Its interests in the Gulf region are wide ranging. About six million Indians work in the Gulf countries and send more than \$10 billion annually as remittances. India imports about two-thirds of its oil supplies from the region. Therefore India has a deep interest in stability in the region. India, though supportive of democracy and human rights anywhere in the world, believes in non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. It is for these reasons that its reaction to the turmoil in the Arab states has been cautious and measured. It abstained during voting on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) imposing a no-fly zone over Libya. Many Western countries criticized India's stand. It was pointed out to India that it had to share global security burdens if it wished to be seriously considered for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. However, besides its principled stand of not interfering in the internal affairs of another country it had to ensure the safety of about 20,000 Indians working on various projects in Libya. Indian nationals were also present in Egypt and Yemen and it had to be mindful of their safety as well.

While some might see India's reaction as passive, it was not easy for India to condemn the existing regimes and support the agitators because its national interests were involved. Condemning the regimes would put Indian citizens at risk and damage the excellent bilateral relations with the countries concerned. Non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries is itself a principled position. India has applied similar standards to turmoil in all other countries as against the selective approach followed by the Western countries.

Some commentators also raised the rhetorical question whether India was pro the regimes or the people. India does not distinguish between the regimes and the people and believes that it is the prerogative of each country to follow a political system which meets its requirement best. It is for the people of each country to decide how they would like to be governed and India would be prepared to deal with any regime that governs a country. This

is part of India's value system. Of course, a political conundrum faces most countries: how to maintain the balance between idealism and national interests? Each country tries to balance its hard national interests with its stated values. India has always supported democracy at home and abroad. This is not the time to take sides. Enthusiastic support for the revolution may have negative consequences. India should be willing to accept any political formation that comes to rule a country with the mandate of its people. India should also provide any help requested for institution building in any of these countries

After the turbulence subsides in the Arab world, many countries including Libya, Egypt and Tunisia would need financial support to help put their economies back on rails and technical help in building institutions. Job creation and reducing economic hardships of the people are important for managing the turbulence and these will continue to be keys to a successful democratic transition. India has already offered to help in the conduct of elections in Egypt and is prepared to help other countries as well. It would also be willing to contribute financially – both bilaterally and multilaterally – and would engage with all governments in the region irrespective of their nature.

One thing is already clear: the Arab world has undergone a major change. Restoration of status quo ante is not possible. Some more regimes may be toppled in the weeks and months ahead while some will survive for years. But there will be major changes in politics and governance across the region. India should be prepared to do business with existing or incoming regimes and assist them in ways that will help restore peace and stability in the region, which is of vital importance to it.

India Needs to Move from ‘Mild’ to the ‘Middle’

Sameena Hameed*

The Arab spring, which has taken the world by surprise, poses major foreign policy challenges for nations like India, and China, with a professed policy of non-interference but who now find themselves increasingly at odds with their global economic profile. The protracted violent conflict between civilians and their authoritarian regimes in the Arab world has put the international community in a strange predicament. On one hand it is realizing the futility of foreign intervention for the cause of democratic movements especially as it affects so many countries; and history has vindicated that air strikes and military operations have never brought about the well-being of people. On the other hand, it is difficult to be mute spectators to the bloodbath of innocent civilians. The region is also of vital interest to nations for energy trade and other economic engagements. For nations in the immediate and extended neighbourhood, the stakes will be higher due to regional spill-overs. There has been increasing realization among countries like China with a traditional sovereignty approach for the need for a more proactive foreign policy on crisis management in their own version of a “responsible stakeholder” as their stakes abroad are increasing, leading to costly rescue operations. The current turmoil in the Arab world presents a challenge for the international community and major players like India to balance their foreign policy to serve the cause of their own people and that of the other nations.

One unsettling factor of the Arab spring is that what began as a people’s movement in many countries may ultimately be hijacked by the Islamist forces. These were not the torchbearers of the movement in most of the countries. But they are fast gaining ground in Egypt and Tunisia. This is more due to the strength of their clandestine sophisticated organizations rather than their Islamist appeal. The protestors are an amalgam of individuals from all walks of life who simply aspire for a better life by toppling their authoritarian regimes. In contrast, the Islamists are well organized and their vision of an Islamic state is a clear political agenda. In Tunisia, the long-banned Islamist movement al Nahda, upon being legalized by the new interim government on 1 March, quickly moved to rebuild itself, with the core leadership reaching out to the tens of thousands of former activists, now out of prison and who are respected local business or civic leaders. There is also a perceptible rise of the Salafi

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trend, which is shaking the foundations of consensus among the protestors. Many of those who drove the popular uprising are deeply discontented about how little the revolution has changed their lives and that their revolution has been stolen.

In Algeria, the Islamists gained support for their resistance to Bouteflika's attempt to retain power. Despite a good economy, tensions with rapidly rising food prices and dissatisfaction with corruption and suppression of dissent led to protests. In Egypt, the Islamist forces were not in the vanguard of the revolution but the Muslim Brotherhood along with many other radical groups is gaining ground. On 27 July several hundreds of thousands of Islamists crowded into Tahrir Square, ranging from Muslim Brotherhood to the conservative Salafi sect and members of the radical Guma'a Islamiyya, outnumbering more than a dozen non-Islamist parties. Since Islam is an integral part of the Arab world, the people's movement may go the Iran way, where Islamist forces take a backdoor entry and hijack the centre stage. Any hasty process of democratization reduced to a formal voting procedure will help the Islamists seize power, as has already happened in Gaza, Lebanon and Iraq, and may also soon happen in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. On the other hand, the delay in holding elections is also deepening mistrust among the key players, giving time to the old regime to secure a foothold and blunt democratic transition.

The issue is not to apprehend the participation of Islamists in politics but to prevent their political hegemony. A credible process that enables their engagement but not their undue empowerment needs to be put in place. This is especially important as another encouraging trend is of the growing popularity of civic Islam especially in Egypt, which has been the engine of Arab imagination. Egypt's strategic location, its cultural legacy and the largest Arab population make it the intellectual and political hub of the Arab world. It has already spearheaded three major political trends in the Arab world: Arab socialism, political Islam and Islamic modernism. Arab socialism was a pan-Arab movement that sought to create a unified Arab nation. A combination of populist nationalism and socialism, it eventually degenerated into authoritarianism, as Arab nations failed to unite for the common Arab cause of defeating Zionism, their greatest enemy. Political Islam, a movement that was spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood, aspired to create Islamic states as a panacea to all Muslim problems and restore Arab glory. Despite being banned, it remained the biggest and the most institutionally organized. Islamic modernism is an important facet of Egyptian intellectual heritage popularized by its founder Muhammed Abduh, a jurist, religious scholar and liberal reformer.

It seeks to act as a bridge between the secularists and the Islamists through a path compatible with Islam and democracy, faith and reason, religion and science. Its institutional form in Egyptian politics are the liberal parties like the al Wasat Party. The latest call is by the proponent of civic Islam, which distinguishes between Islam as a faith and Islamism as a political ideology. Al-Azhar, the main source of Islamic learning in Egypt, gave a call for the establishment of a modern democracy and a non-religious State. It declared that there is no room in Islam for a “theocracy”. Recently, in a document signed by Muslim scholars and Egyptian Christian intellectuals, al-Azhar called for a democratic transition that emphasizes separation of powers.

At the same time, the mature Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood and al Nahda have learnt from the Arab spring that the current young generation, informed and mobilized through Facebook and twitter, will not be hegemonized in the name of Islam or subjected to a pervasive role of Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood in its new incarnation of Justice and Freedom Party has considerably toned down its hard Islamic ideology to remain relevant to the cross-sections of society. It also seeks to allay fears among secular groups and the Christian minority. It has chosen a Coptic intellectual as its Vice President, in an effort to broaden its appeal. It denounced the march of 27 July taking an Islamist overtone. On 22 June, it joined forces with seventeen other parties, including liberals and leftists, to form a common platform for parliamentary elections. Al Nahda is also trying to counter the rising Salafist trend amongst its cadres.

It is for the people to decide which forces they choose to empower, but decades of the Mubarak regime have suppressed any democratic opposition, and the breakdown of authoritarianism has left a vacuum. Consequently, democratic forces need time to build their needed institutions. The Islamists are the only political power with the strength of their clandestine political organization to be able to swiftly fill the vacuum. Whether these reformed Islamist parties, which have consciously avoided the call for a Sharia State during the Arab spring, have left their vision truly behind remains to be seen once they are in power. But the real test would be in the drafting of the new constitution in these states, which establishes the separation of powers between the State and the Mosque and guarantees minority rights. There is disagreement among the political parties in Egypt over whether a new constitution should be written before or after the parliamentary elections.

The Egyptian armed forces moved in to unseat Mubarak with a promise to reframe the constitution and allow elections at the earliest. They have firm control over the economy. They are the largest investors and largely own the

public enterprises. The army is also the second-highest recipient of US foreign aid (after Israel), since Egypt under Sadat signed the peace treaty with Israel. It has been at the centre of all power equations in Egypt. The current tussle is between the people and the army for substantial reforms and electoral process. On 15 July, thousands rallied across Egypt, capping a week of nationwide sit-ins to demand political change, as anger grows with the military rulers. To appease the public, interim interior minister Mansour al-Essawy undertook the largest reshuffle in the ministry's history, but this failed to pacify the protestors, as several ministers they want sacked are still in their posts.

The army has announced parliamentary elections in September. It has disbanded Mubarak's National Democratic Party and has legalized the new party formed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Egyptians are witnessing newfound freedom in forming political parties and getting ready for the country's first parliamentary elections since the 1952 revolution. About two dozen parties will compete to win seats but the new political parties will not have time to develop, organize campaigns and mobilize support. There is growing apprehension about what kind of political system will emerge, as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces produces laws in an ad hoc manner and issues decrees without any consultation.

There is increasing fatigue and disagreement in Egypt amongst the protestors and parties over managing the transitional period. Some are demanding a civil Presidential Council to replace military rule till the elections take place, while others want quick elections. There is also disagreement on the timing of the drafting of the new constitution. There is scope for proactive engagement of responsible stakeholders of the international community with the key players in Egypt in facilitating free and fair elections as well as drafting of the new constitution. China has provided election observers to Sudan for the Southern referendum in 2011. For the US and Israel, Egypt has been the linchpin of a precarious peace situation as well as America's major foothold in the Arab world. The Mubarak regime had preserved the peace treaty for thirty years and the Obama administration refused to call him a dictator. The US is engaging both the army and the Muslim Brotherhood. Recently, US army officials conveyed to Lt. General Sami Annan, Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces, that the "United States military would remain committed to a strong bilateral relationship with both the Egyptian Armed Forces" and "a democratic Egypt". At the same time, the US has also initiated limited contact with several members of the Egyptian Parliament who are Brotherhood members, to remain relevant to all key actors.

India shares nearly a century old diplomatic relationship with Egypt. The

two countries have shared close relations while spearheading the Non-Aligned Movement. Through decades both have worked to improve South-South relations. In 2007, an India-specific industrial corridor was implemented along the Suez Canal development area for collaboration with Egyptian companies to capture the European and African markets. Indo-Egyptian trade is worth nearly \$3 billion and there are substantial investments in the oil and gas sectors, automobiles and the IT sector, which are suffering from the lockouts due to the current protest. Cultural ties between the two nations have always been robust. India's initial mild support to the people's protest was rational, given the earlier doubt over the strength of the movement. But the political landscape in Egypt is changing. With the uncertainty that still looms large, it may not be prudent to take sides but still it is in India's interests to engage with all of the parties that are competing for parliament or the presidency. This engagement could be through Track Two diplomacy to share the experience of democracy, secular polity and drafting of the constitution.

The civil war in Libya is a matter of deep concern and anguish as the casualties and destruction increase. Libya has a population of 6.5 million, ranks eighteenth in crude oil production of 1.79 million barrels a day and ninth in oil reserves of 47 billion barrels. Gaddafi has managed a protracted civil war. The military is drawn from various tribes. The ruling family comes from the Qadhafa tribe loyal to Gaddafi. Their fortunes are linked to Gaddafi, who has doled out positions of authority to them and they are prepared to fight to the end. The Gaddafi loyalists are merciless in their approach towards the rebels. His opposition has a strong Islamist element in Benghazi along with other mutually hostile and suspicious tribes, some of whom constitute the army. The uprising in Libya does not have the flavour and pulse of a people's movement; it is more an armed uprising of rebellious tribes and factions of the military. The military in Libya does not enjoy public support like its Egyptian counterpart. Western Libya has been relatively quiet since Gaddafi's forces quashed initial uprisings there.

Nevertheless, without the support of the tribes, the army and without control of the East it is impossible for Gaddafi to retain power for long. Many individuals from his regime are defecting, some of whom are in the military, making the final outcome reasonably clear. The question is not whether Gaddafi will go, but after how many deaths and when. It is reported that he has ordered the security services to sabotage oil facilities, cutting off the flow to Mediterranean ports. The sabotage is meant to serve as a message to Libya's rebellious tribes: "it's either me or chaos". More than retaking Libya, he intends to make *the rebellious tribes and army officers regret their disloyalty, turning*

Libya into another Somalia.

On 19 March 2011, US and NATO coalition aircraft began the enforcement of a no-fly zone under the auspices of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized nations “acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements ... to take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.” The first few days of the coalition’s intervention in Libya included air assets, violating the UN-imposed no fly-zone, air defence systems, and a few major command and control sites, including Gaddafi’s main compound at Bab al Azizia. From preventive steps, it took an offensive overtone by directly attacking Gaddafi. It fuelled the regime’s anger in the ground war, which has already promised chaos and destruction. The large-scale killing of civilians is more due to Gaddafi’s angered retaliation against the ill-conceived NATO operation rather than prompted by any mass protest as seen in other Arab countries. There are anxieties that the conflict would remain inconclusive till the expiration of NATO’s mandate in late September 2011. NATO is already stretched and some discord among NATO member states has been visible.

There is no obvious power structure to replace Gaddafi. The military is divided and splintered. The opposition forces in February formed a political body, the Libyan National Council, to represent Libya and act as the “political face of the revolution”. On 23 March the council established an Executive Board to act as a transitional government for Libya. The Transitional National Council has been recognized as the only legitimate body representing the Libyan people by the forty-nation International Contact Group at a historic meeting in Istanbul this July. The Group included major world powers and representatives from the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Conference, Arab League, European Union and African Union. This comes on the heels of the International Criminal Court’s indictment of Gaddafi, who has ruled Libya since 1969. Russia and China have recognized the Transitional National Council as one of the negotiating parties rather than sole representative.

India has flourishing trade and commerce in Libya. Indian investments in Libyan oil have also been significant. More than these considerations, India voiced its objection along with China and Russia against the no-fly zone at the UN because of its opposition to the use of force when other means have not been exhausted. By abstaining to vote it prudently balanced its own opposition to the use of force while paying attention to the views of the other Arab nations and the Arab League, who were in favour of it. But in practical terms, by abstaining, India did not pose an obstacle but rather cleared the way for the UNSC to take action against Gaddafi’s regime. Its disapproval of Gaddafi’s

atrocities has been reasonably conveyed when it voted in favour of the earlier UNSC resolution 1970, which was about taking tough measures against the regime as well as referring the matter to the International Criminal Court. Since the situation is still unpredictable, with waning support for the no-fly zone on one hand and renewed attempt by Gaddafi's son Siad ul Islam Gaddafi to woo the Islamists to break away from the liberals, India needs to tread the middle path, which seeks to engage all and estrange none. India can at least recognize the opposition Transitional National Council as one of the negotiating parties.

In Syria the protests for more freedom are intensifying and spreading beyond the southern city of Deraa, where the rallies first began and which has become the epicentre of dissent. Anti-regime demonstrations have become a daily occurrence, instead of being confined to Fridays. The Baath Party has ruled Syria for the last forty years in an autocratic manner. President Bashar al-Assad's brutal suppression is causing a massive bloodbath, to the anguish of the international community. To appease the protestors the cabinet approved a bill that will allow organized political opposition for the first time in nearly five decades. But it is unlikely to pacify the protestors, as the constitutional clause that enshrines Assad's Baath Party as the sole source of political power in the country would only give independent parties the right to operate in opposition or as subservient junior partners of the ruling coalition. Prospects for a national dialogue have floundered, with dissidents refusing to participate in the 10 July talks; the divided opposition held their own conference, announcing a "civil disobedience" drive to bring down the regime. In the month of Ramadan, when "every day is a Friday", the protestors could reach a critical mass. President Assad is surrounded by military and intelligence figures, most of whom are either his relatives or are members of his minority Alawite community. So the Egyptian example, where the military turned on the regime, seems unlikely to be repeated in Syria.

Stability in Syria and Lebanon is linked. Chaos in one could lead to chaos in the other. Essentially, the US and Israel want Syria's regional role weakened, but they do not want the collapse of Assad. The Syrian regime has guaranteed a de facto peace with Israel along the Golan Heights since 1973. But the growing instability and chaos due to the regime's repression of the people have tempted the US to think of Syria being better off without Assad.

India has been the third-largest investor in Syria. Considering its significantly high stakes in that country, India has maintained silence at a time when President Assad's government is under threat and condemnation. Given the Libyan experience, India judiciously abstained from vote in the International

Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which decided to report Syria to the UNSC over its alleged covert nuclear programme. Russia and China also blocked a proposed Security Council resolution condemning the Syrian government, which could have paved the way for more sanctions and intervention. But countries like Russia do realize that international political pressure needs to be put on Syrian authorities to end the bloodshed and solve the country's internal crisis. As atrocities on civilians continued unabated, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, a day after the UN condemnation, called on Assad to "carry out urgent reforms", warning that otherwise "a sad fate awaits him and in the end we will have to take some decisions". Syria also received strong criticism from its former regional allies like Turkey and Qatar. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain have recalled their ambassadors from Syria and have asserted that the brutality of repression is unacceptable. The prudence of Indian foreign policy begins when it shies away from being a part of foreign intrusion in internal affairs but ends when it fails to play its role in building international pressure. Upon assuming the presidency of the Security Council on the scheduled discussion on the situation in Syria, India asked the regime to rein in its security forces. This was far from the mildest form of censure and has no semblance to the weight expected to be exerted by a country with global presence in an important position. Even China had put forth strongly worded diplomatic pressure on Khartoum during the 2008 Olympics, in spite of the growing pressure over its business and political ties with the Sudanese regime, and it was accused of genocide.

Besides the rapidly spreading violent protest, Yemen faces the threat of fragmentation. Al Qaeda-linked militants have made significant gains in the south and al Houthi armed rebels have seized territory in the north. The Yemeni opposition remains divided in its demands. Yemen's youth movement supports President Ali Abdullah Saleh's return as an "honorary" president to oversee the transitional period and ceding all authority to the Vice President. But Yemen's political opposition bloc has called for an escalation against the regime. The current situation has increased al Qaeda's operating space in Yemen. India has rightly supported the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for a peaceful solution and unity of Yemen. Instability in Yemen poses a threat to the oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and the oil trade routes. Instead of waiting and watching the unfolding of events in Yemen, as a responsible stakeholder in the regional turbulence India needs to initiate the formation of collaborative maritime security architecture with the regional stakeholders.

People across the developing world have not forgotten India's role in spearheading their cause in various international fora. In decisive moments of

a nation's history it will be equally difficult to forget India's unwillingness to exert its weight in the building of international pressure against brutal repression of the people in the region, with which it has age-old civilizational ties. The mild trajectory that Indian foreign policy has taken would not yield optimum benefits for India due to its vagueness. But if India takes a middle path with proactive engagement with all the stakeholders through Track One and Track Two diplomacy, it will be more visible and relevant to all the players.

We are living in times where we have to keep running to retain the ground we stand on. Foreign policy articulated solely on national interest does not make a country a reliable partner especially in regional affairs in times when the threat is transnational and alliances are a norm. Rather, graduation to a principle of "responsible stakeholder" would serve both national interest and international expectations. The developing world is nostalgic of a more visible India and often alleges that the country has abandoned its principle of non-alignment. A more visible India can credibly claim that its alliances have not created alignments. Post-Arab spring, India's trajectory in the Arab world will not suffer any reverses due to its current positions but may lose the potential momentum, as these nations will look for reliable partners for their reconstruction and political consolidation, when other powers may readily move in. A middle path is consistent with India's interest and image than a mild one.

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