

DEBATE

INDIA AND TURMOIL IN THE ARAB WORLD: TWO YEARS SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE ‘ARAB SPRING’

The turmoil in the Arab world, termed by some as the ‘Arab Spring’, began on December 18, 2010 and spread through most of the Arab lands. It saw authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya being replaced – the last mentioned helped by external intervention. Elsewhere, regimes, through enacting populist measures, holding early ‘elections’ and generally being seen to be slightly more receptive could stave off immediate turmoil but still fell short of popular aspirations.

The ‘movement’ almost ground to a halt, when it touched Bahrain. The fact that it involved one of the six monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and also had a sectarian tinge led to extraordinary steps being collectively taken to crush it firmly. In Yemen – the only non GCC state in the peninsula, the turmoil was cleverly contained, involving a nominal change of guard.

The issues in Saudi Arabia were multi faceted, that included denial of basic political rights, participation in governance, women’s rights etc. The most important one to come to the fore was the issue of massive unemployment amongst the Saudi youth. In order to address this major issue, the government has recently introduced the ‘Nitaqat’ law that makes it mandatory for local companies to hire one Saudi national for every ten migrant workers. This will have a cascading effect on the Indian workers also.

In Morocco, the King was quick to launch wide ranging reforms and concessions and hold early elections, permitting a moderate Islamist party to share power. Simultaneously GCC offered Morocco (and also Jordan) – the two other similar Arab monarchies - membership of the grouping, insulating them from future problems. This was done as any disturbance there could have direct repercussions in all the other monarchies.

Syria has become a different story altogether. It is up in flames, not necessarily because of the after effects of ‘Arab Spring’ but due to far serious reasons that also have a definite sectarian angle.

Algeria, aided by high oil prices and massive foreign exchange reserves, has always tried to dampen dissent through massive spending. Though far more stable than its neighbours, Algeria is also undergoing a ‘leadership crisis’ as President Bouteflika, in power for three terms, is reported to be seriously ill. There are reports of sporadic demonstrations asking for change.

Even in Turkey, a vibrant democracy, dissatisfaction with the governmental crack down on a popular protest (against removal of a park) has boomeranged into a mass revolt against the regime; some reports comparing the Istanbul ‘Taksim’ Square sit-ins to the Egyptian ‘Tahrir Square’ protests.

India has deep connections with and interests in the region. Two years ago, the *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* ran a ‘debate’ on the issue under the title “India and Turmoil in the Arab World” in its April–June 2011 issue*. Four experts on the subject contributed to the debate then. Given the fact that the region is a major supplier of energy resources, is home to six million Indian expatriates, and also that remittances from these expatriates are both, an economic as well as a social factor in some Indian states, the contributors were asked to critically examine the happenings, the Indian view point and steps taken and suggest future course of action.

The Indian Foreign Affairs Journal had invited the experts (and a few others) to carry forward the debate in light of the developments in the past two years.

(Invitation to contributors had been issued in early June 2013, well before the 3 July developments in Egypt. In fact two contributions had been received before that date, while others were received immediately thereafter.)

Gulshan Dietl, formerly Professor at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and presently an ICSSR Senior Fellow affiliated to Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, was the first to send in her comments. Her contribution was received well before the July overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi by the Egyptian Army and as such did not include subsequent developments that have changed the discourse on the subject. However, ‘Tahrir Square’ was already back in the news by then. Writing on 1 July and looking at the contagion effect on Turkey and the fast changing scenario in Cairo, she noted:

The ‘Spring’ Has Had a Contagious Effect Much Beyond

On May 26, Turkey’s Taksim Square in Istanbul became the site of protests. What started as an opposition to the demolition of a park on the Square to construct a shopping mall quickly acquired a much larger agenda, a constantly swelling number and a spread beyond Istanbul.

The scenes from Taksim seemed like a haunting action replay of the Tahrir. Thousands took to the streets, erected barricades and confronted

*<http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol14/6.2-ejournal.htm>

the police. Others read out poems to them taunting, shaming and challenging them. The people had decided to be there for a long haul, considering the food packets delivered and distributed by the volunteers. The Turkish Spring was definitely in the air. It went on for two weeks, before the police cleared thousands of peaceful protesters in a swift operation. Overnight, all traces of a sit-in were removed.

On June 30, the first anniversary of Muhammad Morsi's presidency, Egypt broke out into two sets of violent demonstrations, those by his supporters, and by his detractors. The Tahrir Square protestors are now divided into two. Their demands are irreconcilable and the outcome unpredictable.

Ranjit Gupta, Former Ambassador of India to Yemen, Venezuela, Oman, Thailand, Spain and Head of the Indian Representation in Taiwan, whose contribution was also received well before the 3 July events, stated:

Fallout of the 'Arab Spring': Challenges for India

India's example as a successful, pluralistic, secular democracy in the world's most diverse country with a very large Islamic persona and with a growing economy, is the best model for inspiration and emulation for the young generation of Arabs. In the context of a rising India, a long-standing traditional friend of the Arabs, having an empirically established and strongly proven mutually beneficial relationship, and greater socio-cultural compatibility with the GCC countries than any other major non-regional country, India need not fear adverse outcomes as a consequence of the tumult in the Arab world.

Finally, given the deteriorating Iranian - GCC relationship, establishing a workable balance in relations between India and Iran on the one hand with that between India and the GCC countries on the other is likely to be the most important challenge for India in West Asia particularly in the next two or three years.

Subsequent to the July overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi that has substantially changed the discourse on the subject, the author also sent in his comments on these developments – in which he states:

What Egypt is witnessing is a no holds barred contest between Muslims and Islamists being played out full throated in public – perhaps the first stage of a desirable denouement. But it is incumbent on all concerned to display patience and mutual tolerance. Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began, ruled by an avowedly Islamist party, is showing the way forward

- it is the only real success story. Tunisia should be viewed as a pilot project which holds great promise for the Arab world. But Egypt is the Arab world's pivotal country and success or failure here will have an impact on the future of the Arab world.

There is no need for India to comment on internal developments within Egypt but it must deal normally with whatever political dispensation is in charge of the country at any given point of time.

Rumel Dahiya, Deputy Director General, Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, a retired Brigadier from the Indian Army who had served as Military Attaché in the Indian Embassy in Ankara, and accredited to Syria and Lebanon; primarily focusing on the turmoil in Egypt and the impact of the Arab Spring on Turkey and reflecting on the future of political Islam in the region opines:

Arab Spring and Future of Political Islam

The Arab Spring has transcended many seasons and is likely to continue on its trajectory for many more. The trajectory will inevitably be uneven as the objective conditions in each of the countries in the region, their capacity to respond and the interests of the external players will vary in each case. Absence of any tradition of democracy or functioning political parties, the existence of internal social and sectarian divides, and high levels of religious orthodoxy prevailing in the region will prevent quick democratisation of the whole region. The monarchies will resist the revolution affecting them by trying to confine the problem to other countries.

However, as events in Egypt and in Turkey indicate, no country will remain immune to the effects of the Arab spring. The sooner the ruling elites understand this, the more peaceful and controlled the transition will be.

Sameena Hameed, Assistant Professor at the India Arab Cultural Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi recommends:

International Community should Desist from Attempting to Tip the Balance

India should wait and watch developments in Egypt and Tunisia as they undergo a 'second revolution'. It has to avoid getting into situations that either directly appeases or impedes the interests of the Gulf States. This contribution to peace and stability in the Arab region through non-intervention, would not only serve its own national interests but also that

of the Arab people.

Two years after the ‘Arab Spring’, it is evident, with the current rejection of the Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia, that the movement, originally devoid of any Islamic flavour, would revert to being just that – a revolution of all the peoples for a better tomorrow. The international community should desist from attempting to tip the balance in favour of any particular stakeholder.

K. P. Fabian, Former Ambassador to Qatar, Finland and Italy, states:

The Second Egyptian Uprising: The Beginning of the End?

Over all, India carefully balanced its interests, its support for democratic values, and its principle of non-intervention. India has started working with the new governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. India has had no special relationship with any of the ousted leaders. Also, what happens in the GCC countries is far more important to India. India took a cautious stand on Bahrain, not only because of the presence of a large Indian community but also because any prolonged turmoil in Bahrain can quickly and easily spread to the rest of the GCC - where there are over 6 million Indians. India’s import of oil from GCC is also a significant factor. India would prefer political stability and absence of discord in the Gulf.

Detailed comments of the authors are in succeeding pages.

The ‘Spring’ Has Had a Contagious Effect Much Beyond¹

Gulshan Dietl*

Samuel Huntington’s thesis envisages democracy progression in waves. The ‘third wave’ was frozen after its initial advances in the seventies. It never washed the shores of the Arab/Muslim world, according to this thesis. Hence, the phrase ‘Arab exceptionalism’ was coined. Today, the term has been resurrected in the context of the Arab Spring. In the present context, the term seeks to demonstrate the democratic upsurge among the people of the Arab/Muslim world and to disprove Huntington’s thesis finally. In fact, the Spring has not remained confined to the Arab/Muslim world, but has had a contagious effect much beyond. People in faraway places like the United States, Russia, Brazil, Greece and Portugal seem to be inspired by the Arab Spring.

Three Regime Changes in Quick Succession

The Arab Spring has not been a uniform development in the Arab world, even though it has had a viral nature. One successful experiment has inspired other or many more simultaneously. Nor has the outcome been uniform, even though the basic demands and methods to pursue them have been similar. None has led to a final result thus far. A long-term social revolution in terms of constitutions, political institutions, legal frameworks or credible experiments in popular participation is still in the very initial phase.

Muhammad Bouazid, a twenty-six year street vendor set himself alight south of Tunis in protest on December 17, 2010. It was a timely spark that gained momentum as the Tunisians went on to protest the suicide. The initial grievances against unemployment and corruption intensified and transformed into the demands for political change and removal of Zainul Abedin Ben Ali, the strongman who had ruled the country for twenty-three years. The protests were helped along by a Wikileaks cable that called Tunisia a “police state” and criticised Ben Ali for being out of touch with the people. It was also revealed

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***The Author**, formerly professor at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, is presently a ICSSR Senior Fellow affiliated to Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

that the entire economic elite in the country was related by blood or marriage to him. In less than a month, he fled the country.

Egypt proved to be the first country to catch the Tunisian contagion. The protests began on January 25 and quickly spread across the country. The Tahrir Square in Cairo turned into a huge camping ground with protesters pitching tents and activists providing services. The numbers swelled and the last day of the month saw a “Million Man March”. The grievances articulated went all the way from food price inflation and high unemployment to the state of emergency laws and lack of free elections. On February 11, Hosni Mubarak resigned after ruling the country for nearly thirty years.

The protests in Libya began towards the end of February. Benghazi, the city on the east coast of the country, emerged as the focal point of rebellion. A Transitional National Council (TNC) was set up there with the express goal of overthrowing the Gaddafi regime. A month later, on March 17, the United Kingdom, France and Lebanon, with support from the United States, proposed resolution 1973 in the United Nations Security Council. It called for a “No Fly Zone” over Libya and authorised member-states to take “all necessary measures” to protect civilians in Libya. On August 23, the Gaddafi regime collapsed with the rebels entering Bab al-Azizia compound in Tripoli, the seat of his authority.

Regional and Global Interventions

The Libyan Spring was not a purely internal affair. It was “facilitated” by the external forces. Since then, regional and global actors have sought to direct the domestic discontent to their benefit. The roles played by Saudi Arabia from within the region and the United States from across the oceans are particularly noteworthy.

The Saudi involvement with the Arab Spring has seen a progression with each case. They were reportedly disappointed by the US abandoning the besieged Mubarak and offered to step in with monetary assistance that the US withdrew from him. King Abdullah came out in support of Mubarak from his sickbed in Morocco. The Saudi response to the Libyan developments was one of reticence, even as they went along with the Qatari lead in inviting foreign intervention.

Yemen was a complicated and multi-layered conflict situation. There was struggle between the families of President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the al-Ahmars. There were confrontations between the ruling elite and the youth. Then, there

were two rebellious groups; a separatist one in the south and the Houthis rebels in the north. The Saudis had three major concerns in the situation. One, the Saudi-born-and-bred al-Qaeda had found a safe haven in Yemen. Some of the “most wanted” Saudi suspects were believed to be operating from there. Two, the long and uncontrolled border had been a regular route for illegal immigration, arms smuggling and narcotics trade. Three, the Saudis saw twenty-four million Yemenis, hungry, heavily armed, and envious of Saudi wealth, as a mortal threat. If a civil war erupted, the Saudis would not have been able to stop the waves of refugees. The Saudis sought to rescue Saleh by granting him a political asylum. In November 2011, he agreed to leave office in an internationally brokered amnesty deal.

It was the Spring in Bahrain that jolted the Saudis into action. The Bahraini day of rage on February 25, 2011 was to mark the ninth anniversary of King Hamad’s announcement of reforms. As the reforms never saw the light of the day, and as the Springs in the North African states produced dramatic results, the Bahraini youth took to the streets. A small island kingdom with a Sunni ruler and roughly seventy per cent Shia population, Bahrain has always been divided along the sectarian cleavage. The Spring, predictably, turned into the Shia struggle for equality.

As the violence erupted beyond the Bahraini authority’s capability to tackle it, the Saudis stepped in. A convoy of 150 armoured troop carriers and about 50 lightly armed vehicles carried about 1,000 Saudi soldiers across the King Fahd Causeway into Bahrain in mid-March. A Saudi security official told the Associated Press that the troops were deployed to protect critical buildings and installations like the oil facilities. The Shia protesters, however, saw the Saudi troops as military occupation. It was an uncharacteristically ferocious response, in comparison to the traditional low-key style of Saudi diplomacy, and was a sign that they felt genuinely in danger and would take the initiative to protect themselves. In the middle of the mayhem in Bahrain, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) appointed Abdul Latif Al-Zayani, an adviser to the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as its Secretary-General.

As the Bahraini and the Yemeni cauldrons continued to simmer, the Saudis reverted to their time-tested dollar diplomacy. They granted the post-revolutionary Egypt \$ 4 billion in aid and as much as \$20 billion were lavished on Bahrain and Oman. In addition to throwing money at the problems, they invited Jordan and Morocco to join the GCC. Egypt is a candidate for inclusion later. At the GCC Summit in Riyadh in December 2011, King Abdullah tabled a proposal to transform the group into a single entity. The attempt is to expand the GCC and tighten its structure.

Beyond the GCC states, the Saudis have projected Sunni Islam as the force of stability and unity. Sunni states in the region, including Turkey, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia are vital to the new foreign policy initiative and are being courted through the traditional method of consensus building. The King sent the foreign minister Saud al-Faisal to Turkey, Egypt and elsewhere to share thoughts and gain perspective. The Turkish President Abdullah Gul visited Saudi Arabia in August 2011. Emissaries were sent to China, Russia, and Japan to sign technical partnership agreements.

When the Spring reached Syria, which has a history of Sunni resurgence against the secular regime of the Assad family, the Sunni bloc in the region and its Western backers found it as an opportunity to expand their reach in the region. This was evident in the Saudi stand on Syria, which, unlike on Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain, was to support the uprising.

In early August 2011, in the first week of Ramadan, King Abdullah recalled the Saudi ambassador from Damascus. In a written statement read out on the al-Arabiya satellite television, he warned, "Syria should think wisely before it's too late and issue and enact reforms that are not merely promises but actual reforms". Shortly following the King's speech, Morocco issued a statement expressing deep concern, adding that it "traditionally refrained from interfering in the internal affairs of other countries", while Jordan, a neighbouring state to Syria whose relations weren't always ideal, expressed "rejection and regret over the continued killing" in Syria. Saudi Arabia's influence in the region was evident when a few hours after it withdrew its ambassador to Damascus, Kuwait and Bahrain followed suit.

Lest there be a doubt about its motive in castigating President Bashar al-Assad's repressive policy, the Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal explained it thus, "Saudi Arabia recently played a leading role in isolating Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's brutal government by demanding an end to the killing of protesters and recalling the Saudi ambassador from Damascus. The impending fall of Mr. Assad's barbarous regime provides a rare strategic opportunity to weaken Iran. Without this vital ally, Tehran will find it more difficult to foment discord in the Arab world. Today, there is a chance for the United States and Saudi Arabia to contain Iran and prevent it from destabilizing the region". The quote is an open admission; even an assertion. The Saudi path to Iran runs through Syria.

In general, the Saudi response to the Arab Spring is driven by Iran. Iran's enhanced status in Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, and indeed among the Saudi Shias is a challenge. The Iranian nuclear programme is perceived as a threat. The Iranian motives in developing its missile capabilities are seen to be directed

against its Arab neighbours, Israel and the US naval assets in the region. The Iranian confrontation with the US has created tremendous uncertainties and instability in the regional politics. The Iranian threats to close the Straits of Hormuz have introduced further strains in an already charged situation. For Saudi Arabia, Iran is an immediate and existential threat.

The Saudis have chosen to take the challenge from Iran beyond the politico-strategic sphere into a sectarian one. Since the Islamic revolution in Iran, the two have constantly questioned each other's Islamic credentials. Today, Saudi Arabia projects itself as the guardian of the Sunni Arabs. It seeks to channel the energy and fervour of the Sunni Arab Islamist groups and the Arab tribes and focus them on the "threat" of Iran. Specifically, it seeks to diminish Iranian influence and Iranian-supported Shia institutions and leaders in the Arab heartland.

The US Response

Barack Obama was seen as a ray of hope in the Arab world. A lot was expected from him on several issues like the Arab-Israel dispute, promotion of freedom and democracy, and a more responsive US policy. On June 4, 2009, he promised "a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world". He did not foresee the looming upheaval in the region.

The Arab Spring caught the US on a wrong foot on three distinct counts. First, it did not see it coming; second, the regime changes meant the removal of US allies (Ben Ali and Mubarak, and Gaddafi more recently); and third, the post-Spring regimes represent the popular mood that is not pro-American. Initially, an optimistic interpretation was given to the popular surge. It showed that violent jihadi militancy had been rendered irrelevant and the way to democracy was through mass-based action. Soon, the elections resulted in the victories of Islamist political parties. Though not necessarily hostile to the US, they would not be the strategic partners like their predecessors. The Arab Spring had turned into an Islamic Winter, according to general perceptions in the US and the West in general.

The US responses to the developments on the ground were indecisive and contradictory, as a result. It supported Ben Ali till the very bitter end. There was an ambivalent policy towards the unfolding drama in the Tahrir Square until February 01, when Obama called Mubarak to step down "now". The Libyan Spring came as one more inconvenient development. The US reluctance to get involved was clearly visible. In the circumstances, it "led

from behind” providing air power and intelligence, but letting the NATO take the lead with the help of its Arab allies. The US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq weighed heavily on Obama’s decision to stay slightly removed on Libya. A more assertive posture would have turned the US into an occupying power, an unenviable situation of military overreach and political incorrectness. On the memorable day of 9/11 in 2012, the US ambassador in Libya was killed in the US Consulate in Ben Ghazi. The earlier optimistic gloss about the irrelevance of jihadi militancy was in shatters, as were Obama’s promise of a “new beginning”.

In purely strategic terms, Bahrain is as important an American ally in West Asia as Egypt under Mubarak used to be. Political stability and a compliant regime in Bahrain is of utmost importance to the US as the American base on the island is considered the most important strategic territory in the area. Any disturbance in the country would be unacceptable to the United States and its Saudi ally. The US carried on its policy of business as usual with the Bahraini government even as the US ambassador expressed “deep concern at the acts of violence”. The Bahraini Crown Prince visited the US in June 2013, where the US Vice President Joe Biden and the Secretary of State John Kerry condemned the violence, welcomed the Bahraini Government initiative in launching the National Dialogue and assured him that the US continues to stand by Bahrain.

The current turmoil in Syria is proving to be the most intractable challenge to the US policy makers. Demanding President Assad’s departure and funnelling of arms to the Syrian opposition via Saudi Arabia and Qatar were safe and soft options for a while. Its recognition of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces on the condition that it would agree to exclude ultraconservative Islamists was clever on paper but futile in the fog of war. In addition, its warning that Assad’s use of chemical weapons would be a “red line” was a ploy to gain time.

In view of the Russian and Chinese veto on a Security Council resolution condemning Syria, the Syrian question has been taken up outside of the UN. An eleven-member body has been set up calling itself the “Friends of Syria”. They are the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. The Summit of the Group was held in February 2012 followed by several conferences. The conference in Doha in June 2013 resolved, “to provide urgently all necessary material and equipment to the opposition on the ground, each country in its own way in order to enable them to counter brutal attacks by the regime and its allies”.

A week before that, the US had announced a high confidence assessment that chemical weapons were used and the redline was crossed. The US would, therefore, change its calculus, expand its military support “responsive to the needs” expressed by the rebel command. The US ground troops would not be used and a “no fly zone” would not be imposed. With these developments, a cliff-hanger moment has been reached. The future may not be that far away.

Enter Turkey and Egypt - Act Two

On May 26, Turkey’s Taksim Square in Istanbul became the site of protests. What started as an opposition to the demolition of a park on the Square to construct a shopping mall quickly acquired a much larger agenda, a constantly swelling number and a spread beyond Istanbul.

The scenes from Taksim seemed like a haunting action replay of the Tahrir. Thousands took to the streets, erected barricades and confronted the police. Others read out poems to them taunting, shaming and challenging them. The people had decided to be there for a long haul, considering the food packets delivered and distributed by the volunteers. The Turkish Spring was definitely in the air. It went on for two weeks, before the police cleared thousands of peaceful protesters in a swift operation. Overnight, all traces of a sit-in were removed.

On June 30, the first anniversary of Muhammad Morsi’s presidency, Egypt broke out into two sets of violent demonstrations, those by his supporters, and by his detractors. The Tahrir Square protestors are now divided into two. Their demands are irreconcilable and the outcome unpredictable.

What are Our Options?

Like the rest of the world, we were taken by complete surprise at the quick pace of events in the Arab world. The Indian response to the Tunisian uprising was a total silence. The reason probably was that Tunisia is not important enough or close enough to be a source of worry. The Indian response to the protests in the Tahrir Square was muted as well. It was only when the “Million Man March” took off in Cairo, that India acknowledged the “articulation of the aspirations of the Egyptian people for reform”. In a statement, the Indian government hoped that “the situation will be resolved in a peaceful manner, in

the best interests of the people of Egypt”.

When the protests started in Libya, there were roughly 18,000 Indians working in Libya. Evacuating them and bringing them back home, under the circumstances, was the first priority for the Indian diplomacy. The security of the Indian Embassy and the Ambassador were equally important. The government authorised Ambassador M. Manimekhlai to leave Tripoli and move to a neighbouring country without waiting for prior approval. Facing tough logistical problems, 18,000 Indians were evacuated from the country.

India was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, when the critical votes were passed on the Libyan situation. Resolution 1973 authorising a no fly zone over the country set the stage for a massive external intervention. India abstained on the same.

On the Syrian case at the UNSC, the Indian vote was in favour of the resolution that called on Syrian President Assad to step down. India has since become more involved in the Syrian quagmire. It has deep concerns about the worsening situation in Syria itself, its spill over effects in the neighbourhood and the consequent instability in the wider West Asian region. It is noteworthy that the Syrian special envoy Ms Buthaina Shaaban visited India on the eve of the BRICS Summit in Durban in March to solicit Indian support in the BRICS discussions. In the circumstances, the BRICS asked for “full and unimpeded” access for humanitarian groups in Syria. The focus of the deliberations remained on economic issues, mainly a plan for a BRICS Development Bank.

India has already assured the UN that it has no plans to pull out its one hundred and ninety-strong troops monitoring the demilitarised zone between Syria and the Golan Heights. India’s participation in the eleven-member “Friends of Syria” group composed of the West and its Arab allies on the one hand and its participation in the 29-member conference hosted by Iran with the aim of stopping bloodshed in the region are acts of balancing or of indecisiveness. Our voice for an inclusive process to peace remains to be heard.

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Fallout of the 'Arab Spring': Challenges for India¹

Ranjit Gupta*

Beyond the emergence of new regimes in four countries – Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, there have been three major consequences. These will have a very significant continuing impact within the Arab world and for all countries that have a stake in the region. They are:

- (i) in the immediate term, the evolving geopolitics of the West Asian region will be greatly influenced by the outcome of the Arab Spring induced acrimonious standoff between Saudi Arabia and Iran personifying a vigorous Sunni response to what has been perceived to be a rising Shia threat;
- (ii) in the longer term, the political rise of Islamist forces is likely to inject a new and powerful factor that could transform many Arab countries into very different personae from that the world has known and dealt with for a long time now; and,
- (iii) the surprise emergence of two increasingly influential new players in Arab world geopolitics – the 6 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Turkey, and the return of Egypt to mainstream Arab politics.

The Saudi-Iranian Cold War

The estimated Shiite population percentages of the GCC countries are: Bahrain around 68 per cent; Kuwait about 30 per cent; Saudi Arabia about 18 per cent; Qatar and the UAE about 10 per cent each; and Oman about 8 per cent. About 65 per cent of Iraqis are Shia. Including Iran, that has 90 per cent Shias, more than 60 per cent of the combined populations of the eight countries of the Gulf region are Shia. Yemen has a 35-40 per cent Shia population. More than 50 per cent of the Arab Gulf region's oil reserves are located in the Shiite populated parts of the region. After the US engineered downfall of the

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The author's comments on these developments, received subsequently, are appended at the end of the article.

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Sunni regime in Iraq, the Shiite political forces emerged as the predominant component of the country's ruling dispensation for the first time in modern history. Iran now has much more influence in Iraq than fellow Arab countries or the United States.

The Shias of Iraq and the GCC countries have been consistently treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against. Furthermore, there is a huge and unbridgeable asymmetry between the national power of the GCC countries and that of Iran in terms of demography, institutional capacity, military manpower strength and indigenous capability. These features provide Iran with enormous potential leverage in exploiting the Shiite identity to destabilise regimes of the Arabian Peninsula countries even without the need for overt instigation of the local Shia population. Saudi Arabia is acutely aware and traumatically afraid of these realities and has adopted the principle that offence is the best form of defence.

Within weeks of protests starting in Tunisia and Egypt, the wave hit Bahrain. The protest movement in Bahrain was not originally motivated by sectarian considerations but by a quest for dignity and equality through greater economic opportunity and political freedom for all its citizens. However, alarm bells rang out loudly in Saudi Arabia, as Bahrain is less than 30 kms off its eastern seacoast where most of its Shiite population is concentrated. Saudi Arabia immediately accused Iran of instigating the huge daily demonstrations and soon thereafter dispatched troops to Bahrain making it abundantly clear that the royal regime there or indeed in any GCC state, would not be allowed to fall. Saudi Arabia also granted \$ 10 billion as aid to finance sops to the restive population even as the King announced some reforms. Bahrain's King had appointed an independent commission of enquiry, which had concluded that there was no Iranian interference and that the government had used unnecessary force. Nevertheless, the Bahraini regime, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries continued to blame Iran by ceaselessly and loudly projecting events in Bahrain in sectarian terms succeeding thereby in pre-empting Western reform oriented pressures on themselves. Meanwhile Bahrain has been actively inviting and granting citizenship to Sunnis from Iraq, Lebanon and Syria to reduce the demographic advantage of the Shias and has recruited even more Pakistani ex-servicemen to bolster its security forces.

Much more importantly, the happenings in Bahrain prompted Saudi Arabia to launch a high profile campaign against Iran. Syria has been Iran's longest standing and staunchest ally in the Arab world. Alone amongst Arab countries it had supported Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. Syria has been the main conduit of Iran's formidable influence in the Levant providing it vital connectivity, enabling

it to create and sustain Hezbollah in Lebanon and support Hamas in Gaza, both of whom have acquired a haloed status on the 'Arab Street' due to their uncompromising resistance to Israel. Iran had thus projected itself as the main defender of Palestinian rights and interests, and undermined the credibility of Arab regimes in the eyes of their peoples. If Assad's regime were to fall, Iran would find it virtually impossible to support Hezbollah and Iranian influence in the sensitive Levantine region would be dealt a virtual deathblow. In fact, Iran's overall ability to play a role in Arab politics would be severely curtailed. Hamas has already moved under the umbrella of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, of which it originally was an offshoot. Thus, Syria is the big prize in the Saudi-Iranian confrontation.

Unlike the four deposed dictators, Assad enjoyed considerable broad based support in Syria and, even after two years of fighting, he still does. He could have ridden out the protest movement but his arrogant rebuffing of all suggestions for political reform and the use of force to suppress peaceful protests set the stage for his foreign opponents to use the evolving situation as a perfect, long-awaited opportunity to hit both, the Assad regime and Iran. It was no longer about democracy and reform as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey came out in open support of the 'rebels' and Assad's removal became their publicly announced objective. Syria has also become the cockpit of a resurrected Cold War, with the US and Western countries supporting the GCC countries and China and Russia supporting Syria, even using the veto thrice in the Security Council. In my assessment there is no possibility of a negotiated settlement, which would permit Assad to be a part of any new ruling structure – too much blood has been shed; also, UN efforts will not lead to any solution. The standoff has now become a zero sum game. This conflict is not about to end anytime soon. A particularly disturbing feature is that even the Syrian opposition acknowledges an alarming growth within their ranks of fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra, an extremist group linked to Al-Qaeda. They are the most effective of the opposition fighters today.

The Rise of Political Islam

Even though they were neither in the vanguard nor even active participants in the pro-democracy protests, the 'Arab Spring' enabled the emergence of the long banned, exiled and persecuted Islamic parties to come out into the open. Their underground organisational networks were activated and they were thus much better placed to take advantage of newly emerging political opportunities. Another bonus was that unlike in the past when electoral success

in Algeria was violently overturned or as in the case of Hamas in Gaza greatly emaciated due to a boycott by most Arab and Western countries, this time around, the electoral success of Islamic parties has been accepted both domestically and by the world at large. Tunisia and Egypt are now ruled by Islamic parties. An Islamist party won the largest number of seats, and heads the governing coalition even in royalist Morocco. Though in post Qaddafi Libya, the moderate pro-business National Forces Alliance won an unexpected landslide victory against the Islamist parties, the country is infested by numerous armed militant groups, many of them salafists. Their muscle power means that they will inevitably play a significant role in time to come. The Islamist genie cannot be put back into the bottle. Apart from there being domestic socio-political consequences of rule by Islamist parties, there will certainly be foreign policy reorientations, even major ones as is already evident in the case of Egypt under Morsi's presidency. The unmitigated hostility of the past against Iran has been replaced by a policy of engagement. In strong contrast to the past, governments of Islamist parties are almost certainly likely to shed overly pro-Western orientations, bring the Palestinian issue back to centre stage, and have more national interest imbued foreign policies.

Emergence of the GCC Countries as a Force in the Arab World

While political change across the Arab world is probably inevitable in the longer term, its content, speed and direction are likely to vary in different countries. I expect it will be the slowest in the GCC region. There are plausible reasons for that. Monarchies are, at the end of the day, a modern version of the rule of tribal sheikhs with which the people have lived throughout history. Before the oil era peoples of the Arabian Peninsula were amongst the poorest in the world while today the general conditions of life are infinitely better than anywhere else in the Arab world. The regimes have the resources to pamper their relatively manageable populations or, to put it more crudely, buy off their loyalties. The common man is not subjected to the kind of petty harassment that is a daily feature of life in most Arab countries, indeed across the Third world. People are seeing the chaos, death, destruction and economic collapse raging in other Arab countries. Why should they risk their comfortable and enviably peaceful lives?

Bahrain will continue to simmer with tensions under the surface but a change in regime does not seem imminent. In fact, reform is possible if and when the Crown Prince takes over. Kuwait's Parliament has been troublesome

for the regime for many years and the turmoil has only exacerbated that. It is possible that Kuwait may be the first to emerge as a constitutional monarchy. Though Oman has witnessed uncharacteristic demonstrations, these were not politically motivated. However, there is a potential problem in that there is no natural successor to Sultan Qaboos, the charismatic, popular and highly respected ruler. No potential successor will have anywhere near the same status in the eyes of the people. The UAE has taken strong measures to quietly intern political dissidents who were mainly Islamist activists. Reports of major unrest in the Shia inhabited eastern province of Saudi Arabia are grossly exaggerated. The king is inducting younger, next generation princes into the government. Issues relating to women are being accorded conscious attention. The single most important issue is not political dissidence and disenchantment, but lack of employment for hundreds of thousands of well educated Saudis; the recent 'Nitaqat' law is one of the steps contemplated to address this serious problem. There has not been any disturbance whatsoever in Qatar.

Regimes in the GCC countries will increasingly band together to ensure that monarchical regimes will not be allowed to be overthrown in any GCC country. Unambiguously strong Saudi rhetoric and the dispatch of troops to Bahrain, along with those of the UAE, were consciously thought out signals to the world and even to their own peoples. If any monarchical regime falls, it will be far more due to internal politics within royal families in connection with issues associated with succession than that brought about by public demonstrations.

The GCC bloc had been singularly impotent as a meaningful strategic factor even in its own region let alone in West Asia as a whole, in the past. However, this time around the GCC countries, individually and collectively, have been playing completely uncharacteristically proactive and substantive roles in supporting and helping each other and taking their adversaries head on. They sent troops to Bahrain. They openly supplied arms to the opposition in Libya and Syria. They brokered the solution in Yemen. They have been shaping decisions in the Arab League and have been proactive in the UN. They have disbursed huge packages of financial aid to poorer brother monarchies and Yemen. A small country with a miniscule population but with very deep pockets and the highest per capita income in the world, Qatar has been assertively hyperactive being substantively involved in far away Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Yemen, mediating in connection with Polisario and in brokering negotiations between the US and Taliban. The involvement of the GCC states has had direct and manifestly tangible

impact on shaping outcomes. They have now developed the self-confidence to be players in relation to developments in West Asia in particular and in the Arab world in general rather than remaining mute and passive witnesses as in the past.

Two Additional Factors

Two additional factors deserve mention:

First: Qatar and Saudi Arabia are seemingly on the same side in relation to the current turmoil but the fact is that they are competing, with Qatar co-opting the Islamists, providing them extremely generous financial aid (to Egypt and Hamas for example) while Saudi Arabia and the UAE are in favour of the moderates and secularists. Even the most knowledgeable experts in and of the Gulf region are at a loss to explain Qatar's hyperactivity.

Second: Despite palpable and growing disillusionment with the US in particular and the West in general, there is unlikely to be any significant dilution of security partnerships between the GCC regimes and Western powers in the short term. Furthermore, despite its steadily eroding standing, diminishing clout, huge financial constraints at home, and overstretched military commitments, the US has no intentions of abandoning its privileged position in the region. Nevertheless, the US now will pay more attention to their views than it had in the past. However, GCC countries are exploring avenues of identifying new security partners much more proactively, notice for which was given by a seminal speech delivered by the Saudi Foreign Minister at the Manama Dialogue in 2005.

Challenges for India

Guidelines for Indian policy vis-à-vis West Asia in the context of events in the Arab world of the past two years should be as follows:

First, in terms of defining and pursuing its policies towards this region India should accord the highest priority to considerations of national interest rather than moral and ethical principles, democracy and human rights concerns, etc. It should not be a question of being seen to be ostensibly on the right side of history; it should be about whether we can or do make a difference by adopting a particular line or not. The situation in West Asia is exceedingly fluid and uncertain. There are multiple players, both regional and non-regional, who are proactively involved on the ground while India is not. Given the

growing chaos, murkiness of evolving situations and the complete uncertainty of outcomes, the cast-in-stone unvarnished reality is that any proactive action India may take, high-sounding statements India may make or new policies India may adopt, it would not have an impact upon evolving ground realities in the region even marginally, let alone meaningfully. India must be fully conscious of these realities.

Second, the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs has always been sacrosanct for India. Reticence or so-called policy passivity in an unpredictably changing environment does not reflect an absence of decision making nor is it an abdication of 'leadership'.

Third, India's national interest stakes in relationships with individual Arab countries and sub regions vary very significantly. India's policies must be country, region and issue specific. Reactions, cosmetically attractive in the context of events in distant countries but which convey ambivalent messages to countries that are important substantively, could be very counterproductive.

India's policy makers should not be deterred by ideologically motivated domestic criticism about supposedly abandoning the so-called arbitrarily defined 'independent' foreign policy or criticism by foreign countries on this account.

Still, it would be useful to examine the importance of India's current relations with some countries of the West Asian region.

In today's world, geo-economics is dictating geopolitics and according to a recent OECD report, India has probably already overtaken Japan as the world's third largest economy in PPP terms. For India to be a global power, it must grow at 8-10 per cent annually for the next two decades at least. Energy is the key. India is not only energy deficient but is also already very highly dependent on imported energy. At present, about 55 per cent of India's oil imports come from the GCC countries. If Iran and Iraq are taken into account, India's dependence on the Gulf region reaches almost 80 per cent. Five of the top six suppliers to India are from the Gulf region. By 2030, India will need to import more than 90 per cent of its requirements and the volumes would be very considerably larger than that at present. Every single projection by international, regional and national agencies indicate that India's hydrocarbon dependency on this region is going to keep increasing in the future and the GCC countries will be the linchpin.

Saudi Arabia has been the leading source of fulfilling India's oil requirements, supplying 22 per cent of the requirement for some years;

its share has been steadily increasing. Saudi Arabia, or indeed any other GCC country, never stopped oil supplies to India nor even threatened to do so through the four wars with Pakistan despite their special relationships with Pakistan. In fact, it has made up shortfalls from other suppliers when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 and after the US invaded Iraq in 2003. It has publicly offered to make up any shortfalls due to imports from Iran being constrained due to sanctions. Three GCC countries – Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait are amongst the top six oil suppliers to India with Iraq today being the second highest. Qatar is the largest supplier of LNG by far.

In 2011-12, two-way trade (including oil) was valued at \$146 billion, a 23 per cent increase over the previous year, the largest by far with any regional grouping including the EU. In country-wise trade, the UAE and China have alternated in being India's leading trade partner. India's trade with the UAE was \$72 billion in 2011-12. In strong contrast with its trade relationship with China, the UAE is India's leading export destination and India also had a small favourable trade balance whereas India's trade deficit with China is larger than India's exports to it. The value of two-way trade with Saudi Arabia in 2010-2011 topped \$25 billion, rising an incredible seven times in five years making Saudi Arabia India's fourth largest trading partner. Indo-GCC trade has exhibited the fastest rate of growth of Indian trade with any region increasing by 1600 per cent in the period 2000-2008; this is much faster than China's rate of growth of trade with the GCC countries that is at 900 per cent; beating China in any trade related statistic is an incredible feat!

Heads of State or Government of all GCC countries have visited India in the past decade, some more than once. The Riyadh Declaration between King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the Indian prime minister has elevated the bilateral relationship to one of strategic partnership embracing defence cooperation also. In fact, defence and security cooperation has become a feature of the relationship with all other GCC countries also. Extradition of two high profile terrorists to India by Saudi Arabia last year despite exceptionally strenuous efforts by Pakistan to prevent it, is a particularly significant reflection of how far this relationship has come. The UAE has been similarly helpful for some years now.

Almost 6.5 million Indians live and work in the GCC countries, Indians are the largest expatriate group in the GCC region as a whole and in each country individually; the numbers have been rising constantly and the gap between Indians and Pakistanis widens each year. Considering that these are extremely 'internal security' conscious Muslim countries these statistics represent a resounding vote of confidence in India and Indians. Almost 50 per

cent of India's total inward remittances come from the GCC region. Almost 50 per cent of total flights to and from India are between India and the six GCC countries.

India has the world's third largest Islamic population and the second largest Shia population. Islam originally came to India from Oman through traders within decades of the origin of this great religion. Islam provides another significant bond between the region and India.

India is a socio-culturally compatible country with rising economic, military and political power. It has the world's fastest trade growth rates and oil import growth rates with the region. Being located next door to GCC countries also works in its favour. These are all factors that have transformed this relationship into one of truly symbiotic mutual benefit. The GCC countries have obviously consciously decided to bypass the Pakistani and Israeli factors-elements, which would normally have been considered virtually unsurpassable roadblocks. These facts exhibit that pragmatism has quietly trumped both ideology and supposed special relationships in forging the current relationship.

All this has been possible largely due to a low-key non-intrusive Indian policy approach to the region guided solely by considerations of mutual benefit. This approach is the best way forward supplemented by extending full support to endeavours of the countries of the region in addressing their problems themselves - individually, bilaterally, regionally through their organisations such as the GCC and the Arab League.

As this account clearly exhibits, the GCC countries constitute India's largest socio-economic partner anywhere in the world today. India's relationship with the GCC countries has the potential to have a strong impact on India's prosperity, well being and security, internal and external, for the next decade or two. Therefore, maintaining an excellent overall relationship with GCC countries has in fact become a very significant strategic imperative for India.

Suicide bombings and sectarian attacks have worsened in Iraq in the past two or three years and the increased activism of the beleaguered Sunni community could perhaps also be linked to the ongoing turmoil in the Arab world. Despite the fact that after Nasser, Saddam was India's best friend in the Arab world for decades, the India-Iraq relationship seems to have disappeared from the radar completely judging by its total absence from Indian media coverage and the very proactive seminar scene in Delhi. India withdrew all India based personnel from its Embassy in Baghdad shortly after the US invasion in 2003, sent a junior level *Charge d'Affaires* in late 2004 and an

Ambassador only in June 2011. There have been no visits by Indian senior officials let alone ministerial visits to Iraq till the foreign minister's visit in June 2013. A few Iraqi ministerial visits have taken place.

India and Iraq had a very active Joint Commission for Economic and Technical Cooperation that met very frequently until 2003; however, it last met in 2007. Prior to Saddam being deposed, India was very actively involved in executing projects in Iraq – this remunerative and mutually beneficial activity has been badly affected. Due to unsettled conditions, an embargo was placed on Indians going to work in Iraq, which was finally lifted in May 2010.

Apart from the US, the EU, Iran and Syria, which have special relationships with Iraq, China, South Korea and Turkey have also been very active there. Despite this and India's relative lethargy, India had emerged as Iraq's top export destination and its second largest trade partner in 2011. (Source: trade.ec.europa.eu)

The scene on the energy front has been equally impressive. India, along with the US, was the largest importer of Iraqi crude oil in 2012 making Iraq India's second largest source of oil after Saudi Arabia, much ahead of Iran. In fact, the Iraqi government has offered to step up oil exports by 30 per cent. The IOC is the single largest purchaser of Iraqi crude. India is now once again becoming involved in an increasing way in the oil sector in Iraq. India needs to pursue this relationship energetically.

The rise of political Islam in the contexts of democratic constitutional frameworks should not be a matter of concern to a pluralist democratic India. In fact, giving Islam its due place in politics is the only way to diminish radicalism. Though considerations of Islamic solidarity may come into play in greater measure than before, however in fashioning external relationships, national interest and pragmatic considerations of direct mutual benefit are likely to be given priority. This in fact has happened specifically in the case of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE with whom India today has excellent relations. India's relations and interaction with the new Egypt are in my view already better than those during the sterile Mubarak period. India need not lose sleep due to the ascendancy of political Islam.

Conclusion

To conclude, India's example as a successful, pluralistic, secular democracy in the world's most diverse country with a very large Islamic persona and with a growing economy, is the best model for inspiration and emulation

for the young generation of Arabs. In the context of a rising India, a long-standing traditional friend of the Arabs, having an empirically established and strongly proven mutually beneficial relationship, and greater socio-cultural compatibility with the GCC countries than any other major non-regional country, India need not fear adverse outcomes as a consequence of the tumult in the Arab world.

Finally, given the deteriorating Iranian - GCC relationship, establishing a workable balance in relations between India and Iran on the one hand with that between India and the GCC countries on the other is likely to be the most important challenge for India in West Asia particularly in the next two or three years.

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(The above contribution was received well before the 3 July overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi by the Egyptian Army and as such did not originally include subsequent developments that have changed the discourse on the subject. The author's comments on these developments, received subsequently are appended below)

Speaking to an audience in Muscat in February 2011 on the upheaval in Egypt, the author had observed – “The suddenness and spontaneity of the upsurge involving tens of thousands of people took everybody by surprise not only around the world but in Egypt itself – the government, the armed forces and intelligence and security agencies, banned entities such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and indeed, I suspect, even the participants themselves. Despite not having an individual or an organized entity to give the protest movement leadership, a coherent direction and a road map for future action and attempts to disperse them by force, the unprecedented public protests in Egypt, now well into their second week without any signs of abating, have made a return to status quo ante virtually impossible. Mubarak will have to go. The timing, however, will not be determined by either international pressure or activity in *Midan Al –Tahrir* but by the Army top brass. There is likely to be an Army supervised slow transition to increasingly pluralistic governance structures but establishment of a full scale democracy could take some time to emerge in part because the existing constitutional and legal frameworks would have to be drastically changed. Given the nature of Egyptian society and the overwhelmingly secular composition of the protest movement, there is little likelihood of the Muslim Brotherhood assuming or being allowed to assume a larger-

than-life profile in the emerging political scenario.” This is precisely what has happened over the past 2 ½ years.

Though banned for most of the past 60 years, the Muslim Brotherhood’s long established underground cadre was active in mosques and engaged in social welfare work particularly in rural and urban poor areas. It was the only really organized party except for the discredited governing party during Mubarak’s rule. The Brotherhood and the salafist Al Nour parties obtained a resounding victory in the parliamentary elections emboldening Morsi to establish a 100 member Constituent Assembly consisting mainly of Islamists. The Constitution they drafted was clearly Islamist oriented and was adopted in a national referendum by a 64 per cent favourable vote but the voter turnout was only 33 per cent.

During the first round of the presidential vote, Morsi secured only 24.78 per cent, whereas the former prime minister Ahmed Shafik won 23.66 per cent. It is a telling fact that Hamdeen Sabahi, a well-known political activist, contesting as an independent, came third with 20.7 per cent. Forced into a runoff, Morsi’s victory margin was a mere 3.4 per cent. The overall voter turnout in the first round was about 46 per cent and in the second round it was marginally higher with Morsi getting 51.73 per cent and Ahmed Shafik 48.27 per cent. Though the Muslim Brotherhood clearly won the first free elections in decades, Morsi barely squeaked into office. Ignoring all this and campaign promises of ‘inclusivity’, he increasingly pushed an Islamist agenda and policies for which he clearly had no mandate, assumed arbitrary powers by decree and inept and poor governance made a desperate economic situation even worse. Islamists were appointed governors of all provinces but the appointment of Adel El-Khayat, a leading member of Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya, widely blamed for the infamous 1997 Luxor attack in which 58 foreign tourists were killed, was a particularly inept move which was widely condemned. Al Khayat had been imprisoned for one year after Sadat’s assassination.

Growing disillusionment resulted in large scale protests gathering steam by the day. Twenty-two million signatures had been collected for his removal. By end June - early July 2013, millions of protestors were calling for his ouster. Crowds were often larger than when anti-Mubarak protests were taking place. All this was a clear indicator that despite 91 per cent of Egypt’s population being Muslim, the people did not want an Islamic State and an Islamist governance framework – they had not got rid of Mubarak to live under an Islamist dictatorship.

Flanked by an array of public figures including opposition leader Mohamed El Baradei, the Sheikh of al-Azhar Ahmed el-Tayeb, Coptic Pope Tawadros II, representatives of Tamarod, the youth opposition movement that mainly engineered the wave of protests against Morsi and even representatives of the ultra conservative Islamist Al Nour party, Defence Minister and Army Chief Gen Abdul Fattah al-Sisi announced that Adli Mansour, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, would take over as interim President. A new government under respected foreign educated economist Hazem al-Beblawi as prime minister, including some who were ministers under Morsi, three women and many technocrats, has been sworn in. El Baradei is Vice President and Sissi First Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister.

A road map for transition has been announced which envisages a committee of 10 people, four professors and six jurists suggesting amendments to the existing constitution, which has been suspended, which will then be reviewed by a group of 50 prominent civil society members and thereafter submitted to a national referendum to be followed by parliamentary and presidential elections, all of this to be accomplished within the next six months. Given the highly vitiated atmosphere this approach appears quite reasonable. Though they have so far stayed away it is to be hoped that representatives of Islamic parties will join in the process.

Notwithstanding all this, the overthrow of the Morsi government by the military is certainly a military coup. However, there is also much relevance in what prominent Egyptian author Alaa Al Aswany has written: “the army didn’t stage a *coup d’etat*; rather it carried out the will of the people in exceptional circumstances to oust a president who had lost his legitimacy”. Be that as it may, the military ousting a freely and fairly elected government sets a regrettable precedent. This has been compounded by the detention of the top leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, confiscation of their assets, imposition of a travel ban and initiation of cases against them. Pro-Morsi demonstrations demanding his reinstatement have been taking place daily. They carry banners calling al-Sisi a traitor and for him to be executed. Almost hundred people have been killed including, in one incident, security forces shooting dead more than 50 protesters.

First the military hijacked the Revolution and thereafter the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to do the same. The current situation exhibits that Egyptian society is being dangerously polarized.

In Islamic countries Islamic political parties must be given full, due and legitimate space for active participation in the country’s political domain.

Traditional Islamic theology holds that Islam is self contained and provides adequate mechanisms and frameworks for governance of society. This may have been valid when Islam was founded and in medieval times, but in the context of today's globalized, interdependent world where everybody knows how everybody else lives and in which social media can instantly mobilize hundreds of thousands of people, serious consideration has to be given to the desirability if not necessity of considering what the Christians achieved by separating church and the state, albeit over centuries.

What Egypt is witnessing is a no holds barred contest between Muslims and Islamists being played out full throated in public – perhaps the first stage of a desirable denouement. But it is incumbent on all concerned to display patience and mutual tolerance. Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began, ruled by an avowedly Islamist party, is showing the way forward - it is the only real success story. Tunisia should be viewed as a pilot project which holds great promise for the Arab world. But Egypt is the Arab world's pivotal country and success or failure here will have an impact on the future of the Arab world.

In conclusion, there is no need for India to comment on internal developments within Egypt but it must deal normally with whatever political dispensation is in charge of the country at any given point of time.

Arab Spring and Future of Political Islam

Rumel Dahiya*

Two years after the outbreak of the Arab revolutions, the trajectory and the outcome of the process are still uncertain. Whereas the autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt were overthrown, the alternate mechanism has not really worked. As per the Failed State Index, published in the US, Egypt has moved up from 49th to 31st position and Tunisia from 118th to 94th position. It is almost as expected. In the shadow of despotic regimes, no political alternative could develop and take roots, as a result of which, the incoming regimes made some of the very same mistakes that the outgoing regimes had made. Fragmentation of state authority has taken place to some extent in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. However, the good news is that there is a real agenda for democratization in the region and for the first time, elites are being put to test. Serious discussions on civil-military relations, the place of civil society organizations, transparency and the role of underground groups have all gained importance in the political arena. A complex process of adjustment will follow before the state authority is stabilized.

The revolution in the Arab world has not stopped. The civil war in Syria has slowed the momentum of the Arab Spring because in many countries the people may be apprehensive of a similar fate visiting them if they agitated. However, the latest turn of events in Egypt suggest that the convulsions are likely to continue for many years until democracy takes roots. For that to happen, inclusive political process and tolerance amongst contending political players will be essential.

Keeping in mind their importance and the unexpected nature of developments in the two important countries in the region, this article primarily focuses on the turmoil in Egypt and the impact of the Arab Spring on Turkey. Besides, the paper reflects on the future of political Islam in the region.

Fresh Turmoil in Egypt

The emerging consensus is that Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood have lost Egypt. The revolution against the Hosni Mubarak regime in early 2011 was

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literally leaderless but had the support of diverse sections of the Egyptian society; particularly the youth. The Muslim Brotherhood was not in the forefront of the revolution but was definitely its main beneficiary by virtue of being the best-organized social and political group. The military assumed power soon after Mubarak was over-thrown but gradually ceded power to the elected president in 2012. The president also made many changes amongst the senior positions in the armed forces including replacement of General Tantawi by General Sissy as the defence minister. However, there was a constant struggle between the judiciary and the old bureaucracy on the one hand, and Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other. Having won the presidency in the run-off with merely 51.7 per cent of the votes against a candidate identified with the old disgraced regime should have been a reminder to the president that neither he nor his party enjoyed an across-the-board support amongst the voters and that many non-Brotherhood revolutionaries would have voted for him believing his promise of national unity and inclusiveness.

A series of missteps by Morsi like imposing media curbs, interference in the judicial processes including appointment of an ideologically aligned prosecutor-general, efforts to rush through a constitution without building national consensus around it, establishment of party control over state media, appointment of loyalists in key state positions, were only some of the measures taken by Morsi to hijack the revolutionary agenda. The biggest error of Morsi was the constitutional declaration of November 2012. He gave himself the powers to amend the constitution unilaterally and immunity to his decisions from judicial review, which brought all political elements other than the Muslim Brotherhood together in opposition to Morsi and his party. The new constitution was supposed to herald a new democratic future for Egypt. Instead, the draft of the constitution prepared by the Brotherhood against the will of the liberals and minorities became the most divisive issue in the country. The fact that it was passed in a referendum is not because the majority was in its favour but because the referendum was boycotted by many sections since the opposition was divided amongst those who opposed the constitution and those who expressed their opposition by boycotting it. Another major issue was the use of Shura Council or the Upper House of Parliament to legislate on extremely important but controversial issues like Electoral and Political Rights Law, Non-Governmental Organisation Law, Judicial Reform Law etc. All these laws advanced the Islamists' agenda and riled various sections of the society and the institutions including the judiciary. The efforts to

cut the judiciary to size inevitably led to a very serious conflict between the institutions, which raised serious questions about the democratic credentials and intention of the Brotherhood.

Handling of the economy was another major negative mark against Morsi and the party. The government proved hopelessly inept in handling the economic challenges that Egypt was facing. The prices of essentials rose sharply. There were frequent power breakdown. Foreign currency reserves plummeted despite financial assistance from Qatar and non-availability of fuel caused sufferings to the people. Morsi included many party-faithfuls in the cabinet who neither had any experience of running the administration nor political acumen. Although the Muslim Brotherhood had been talking about a “Renaissance Project” to energise, motivate and engage all Egyptian people in the building of the modern Egypt, its actions actually amounted to excluding and marginalizing the liberals and the religious minorities. The deteriorating security situation in Sinai and ideological differences with the Saudi regime complicated the matters for the Muslim Brotherhood and the political party supported by it, i.e. the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). The Brotherhood had systematically reneged on all the promises it made to the other political parties and groups.

By middle of the year 2013, all except the most radical allies of the president stood antagonized. The irony of the fact is that the very same people who stood up against the Mubarak regime in 2011 started demanding the ouster of the Morsi regime with the help of the Egyptian Army. Despite mild protests from some of the friends of the Brotherhood and liberal democracies across the world, the overthrow of Morsi by the Egyptian army has generally been accepted as a necessary development, which will hopefully lead to democratization of the state. The second wave of the unfinished revolution in Egypt resulting in the overthrow of Morsi cannot be considered a success of the secular National Salvation Front or the new grassroots protests movement, Tamarod (meaning ‘revolt’ in Arabic). The campaign had a solid behind-the-scene support of the Salafists and its political front, the Nour Party. This strengthens the suspicion that it had the support of external powers particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This assessment is supported by the fact that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia was the first international leader to congratulate the interim President of Egypt, Mr Adly Mansour. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait together have offered grants, aid and oil supplies totalling \$ 12 billion.

Obviously, the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt is a positive sign for Saudi Arabia and Iran and has a negative connotation for Turkey, Qatar and Hamas. Till he lasted in power, Morsi was very powerful.

Being a democratically elected leader of the most populous Arab country and his closeness to a very powerful Sunni political organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, gave Morsi a huge political clout. He enjoyed great credibility and people listened to him. Although Morsi's position with regard to Syria was a source of discomfort for Iran, the latter still supported Morsi for two reasons. First, Saudi Arabia disliked the Muslim Brotherhood and was working to undermine it through the Salafists. Therefore, Saudi Arabia was a common adversary of the regimes in Egypt and Iran. Second, both regimes in Saudi Arabia and Iran follow a deeply religious ideology and are constantly competing for regional predominance. With Saudi Arabia gaining influence in Egypt, Iran may not mind if Egypt gets mired in a civil strife since it will be left with less time and energy for intervention in Syria and Palestine, thereby, leaving more room for Iran to operate.

The Muslim Brotherhood was nobody's favourite to start with and had limited support from a handful of countries like Qatar, Turkey and Iran for different reasons. The West did not want to be seen to be opposing the Muslim Brotherhood despite disagreeing with its political philosophy, and apprehensions about its foreign policy orientation. The reaction of foreign powers once Morsi was deposed has been on predictable lines. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait have welcomed the change and have promised financial aid to the interim regime. Turkey has strongly criticized Morsi's removal and has spoken about his reinstatement. Syria has welcomed the overthrow of the Morsi regime and has termed it as a defeat of political Islam. Iran has also criticized Morsi's removal; and the West while expressing concern about the turn of events has refrained from calling Morsi's removal by the army as a coup.

The question that begs an answer is 'what now?' Morsi was accused of becoming increasingly authoritarian, failing to tackle Egypt's economic problems and for pursuing an Islamic agenda. These allegations were not entirely untrue. However, in the eyes of his supporters the stigma of incompetence and non-performance would be washed away by the act of his removal. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood may also gain some public sympathy. The Brotherhood cadres are unlikely to take his removal lying down. There is every chance that they will oppose the interim regime, politically and perhaps, even physically. Their sympathizers within the establishment are expected to help the Brotherhood. The Egyptian economy is unlikely to stabilize due to political instability and the interim government will find it extremely hard to meet the people's expectations. Despite generous offers of aid from the Gulf monarchies, no quick economic turnaround of the Egyptian economy is foreseen due to its structural constraints. It is

also difficult to imagine the Muslim Brotherhood agreeing to support the framing of a liberal-secular constitution for the country since that would be an anathema to its hard-core leadership.

Considering its geo-strategic location, size of population, its history and experience of leadership in the Arab world, the developments in Egypt will have a far-reaching impact. Some will see the on-going struggle in Egypt as a failure of political Islam whereas others will see it as a necessary struggle before political Islam finally firms in. With Morsi's departure, the power of the Muslim Brotherhood to influence events outside Egypt is bound to diminish even if for a limited period. It is also possible that some elements from the Muslim Brotherhood may break away and form a new political party or join other Islamists like the Nour Party to disassociate themselves from the incompetence exhibited by the Freedom and Justice Party. It is also possible that militant elements from the Muslim Brotherhood might take up arms and Egypt might be engulfed in a civil strife with far reaching consequences for the entire region; the instability in that case will spill over to other neighbouring countries.

At least in the short run, there are chances of very serious confrontations between the supporters and opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood and even the army will find it difficult to play the role of an arbiter yet again. A split in the Brotherhood is, however, possible provided the army does not blink first. The tourism sector, which is its largest foreign exchange earner is likely to remain an under performer and taking a cue from Ethiopia, the upper riparian states of the Nile are likely to start projects for utilization of the Nile waters within their territories. This is bound to affect Egypt in the long run. The Egyptians are bound to be left wondering whether the revolution was worth the pain. However, the country is unlikely to revert to the old ways of autocratic dictatorship after the people have realized their power for the second time in just over two years.

The latest events in Egypt are reminiscent of Algeria after the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had won the elections in 1992, but was not permitted to assume power. The FIS had engineered mass scale disturbances and violent incidents, which resulted in a civil war. By their actions, the Islamists showed that they were incapable of the moderation that democracy demands. It is hoped that the Muslim Brotherhood takes appropriate lessons from the Algerian experience and avoids dragging Egypt into a civil war. It will also be in the interest of the Muslim Brotherhood to do so looking at the experience of the 2012 legislative elections in Algeria wherein the Green Alliance, a coalition of Islamists political parties, gained very few seats.

Impact of Arab Spring on Turkey

Although Turkey is not an Arab country, the onset of the Arab Spring presented Turkey with a great opportunity for the spread of its soft power and to gain an upper hand in the leadership sweepstakes in the region. The West, unable to discern how to deal with political Islam, enthusiastically endorsed the idea of showcasing a long time NATO ally Turkey and its political system as a role model for the countries facing the onslaught of the Arab Spring. Although its inherent vulnerabilities forced Turkey to temper its rhetoric about an ideational foreign policy and alter its position in Libya and Bahrain, it still gained a lot of political mileage out of the Arab Spring. The Turkish prime minister with undeniable popular support at home tried to create an even larger diplomatic and political space for Turkey in the West Asian and North African region by advocating strong support for the democratic movements. He also tried to use Turkey's friendship with Syria as a leverage to nudge President Assad into introducing reforms in Syria. However, after an initial euphoria following the change of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, realization dawned on Turkey that it had limited power to influence events even in its immediate neighbourhood. It must have also made Turkey realize that the revolution was not caused by the lure of the Turkish model but by more enduring and fundamental issues in each country like the denial of freedom, unemployment and inequality. The smart political game played by the Syrian Kurds in standing out of the conflict and preserving their strength to be able to bid for higher political stakes at an opportune time, forced Erdogan to initiate a peace process with the Turkish Kurds by enlisting the support of the jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, incarcerated in Imrali prison near Istanbul since 1998.

While the Arabs were fighting for freedom from autocratic regimes, Erdogan himself was turning more autocratic wherein the opposition was being bludgeoned into submission. The freedom was being curtailed and Islamisation of politics was being pursued albeit in a business friendly environment. The ill-concealed attempt to bring in a presidential form of government with executive presidency by amending the Turkish constitution with an aim to assume presidency in 2014 has now come to haunt Erdogan himself. His opponents accuse him of starting the reconciliation process with the Kurds with an aim to enlist the support of Kurdish dominated Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) for amending the constitution. Erdogan had also hoped that by enlisting the support of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the anti-Assad Western powers, Turkey would be able to overthrow the regime in Syria and expand its influence in the region. Turkey has already been involved in questionable oil deals with the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq, thereby

straining its political and economic ties with Iraq. It has now managed to annoy Iran and Russia because of its deep involvement in the Syrian conflict. Large-scale deaths in the bomb explosion in the Turkish town of Reyhanli on the Turkey-Syria border in May 2013 brought home the reality to Turkey that there is a price to pay for involvement in the internal conflicts of other countries.

The Taksim Square agitation in May/June 2013 is mistakenly compared by some, to the demonstrations at Tahrir Square. The situation in Egypt and Turkey are very different despite a few similarities like the role of the social media in spreading the message, and the influence of the military in decision making until a few years back. The multi-party democracy has been practised in Turkey since 1950 whereas Egyptians had never known free and fair elections before 2011. Besides, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Erdogan have won three consecutive elections since 2002 with clear majority. On the other hand, the Freedom and Justice Party was formed by the Muslim Brotherhood only in May 2011 and has less experience of political mobilization. The Turkish economy has grown impressively over the last decade whereas the Egyptian economy has more or less stagnated over the same period. Even in most of the social indicators, Egypt lags behind Turkey. Whereas the army in Turkey has been brought under the effective control of the civilian authority, the Egyptian army still remains the arbiter of disputes in Egypt. In Turkey the protests were mishandled initially out of over confidence and later deliberately with a view to consolidate the conservative support base of the ruling party. The protests in Turkey also grew because a large number of groups were affected by the government's turn towards conservatism and denial of personal freedom rather than alleviating economic deprivation. The protests in Egypt on the other hand primarily erupted out of the frustrations of the youth who were denied their basic freedom and lacked opportunities for economic and social development.

The ruling party in Turkey has reacted most forcefully to the removal of Morsi from power in Egypt. In fact, this is perhaps the only foreign government that has asked for the immediate reinstatement of Morsi. The Turkish prime minister has said that the only way of removing a democratically elected government is through the ballot box alone. The Turkish government has made no mention of Morsi's autocratic tendencies or the fact that millions of people in Turkey were demanding his removal. In fact, it is using the argument about the primacy of the ballot box to justify the democratic legitimacy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the AKP rule in Turkey. Although the army has been put on the back foot in Turkey and many of its retired and serving generals put behind the bars for their alleged role in undermining democracy

in Turkey, the ruling AKP is perhaps fearful of the army again staging a coup in case of a serious internal turmoil in Turkey. This apprehension may explain the harsh crackdown against the peaceful demonstrators at Taksim Square in Istanbul in May-June 2013 and at other places like Ankara and Izmir. However, as of now, there is no threat whatsoever to the AKP government either from the military or from the opposition parties. In fact, feeble political opposition is one of the problems for Turkey.

At another level, Morsi's removal from power has denied the AKP the chance to form a Turkey-Egypt axis in the region with support from tiny Qatar. Both the countries were longing for a leadership role in the region and were opposed by the entrenched powers – Saudi Arabia and Iran. The ideological kinship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the AKP was one of the reasons for the Turkish government granting \$1 billion loan to Egypt in 2012 when the Egyptian government was struggling for funds. Turkey's leadership was also engaging the Muslim Brotherhood to follow the model of governance adopted by the AKP in Turkey to prove the theory that Islam and democracy could co-exist. In practice, however, Erdogan started behaving more and more like an autocrat and started pushing through his Islamic agenda. Overthrow of the Morsi regime will, perhaps, force a rethink in Turkey as well, both domestically and regionally. At the local level, the ruling party may become more inclined to accommodate the concerns of the opposition parties with regard to the amendment of the constitution. Factions within the ruling AKP, that were unhappy with Erdogan's political ambitions and ideological overzealousness are likely to use this opportunity for advocating moderation in dealing with the political opponents and the media. The government may also be forced to reconsider its policy of humiliating the Turkish military any more.

Externally, the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Egypt will also affect Turkey's policy on Syria and Palestine adversely. Hamas will need new friends after the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and may be forced to reengage with Iran. The position of Egypt under the Muslim Brotherhood with regard to Syria was similar to the policy of Turkey. Both were opposed to the continuation of Bashar al-Assad in power and were supporting the opposition. It was, therefore, natural for Assad to express his satisfaction at the overthrow of Morsi.

Sustained economic growth under his premiership has fetched Erdogan and his party credibility and popular support. He was wise in focussing on mending the economy before embarking on strengthening political Islam. It is difficult to foresee any political upheaval in Turkey for the present.

Notwithstanding the above, it is clear that even Erdogan has not been able to find a perfect formula that balances Islam and democracy even though he has presided over an economic resurgence in Turkey. His growing authoritarian behaviour, political intolerance and Islamisation of politics have cast a shadow on the Turkish model of democracy. Use of harsh language against the protestors, including terming them terrorists, hooligans and agents of foreign conspirators followed by tough police action against them has dented the democratic credentials of the ruling party. While the protests in Istanbul have been controlled, there are problems ahead in constitution making and resolving the Kurdish issue. Unless Erdogan accommodates the views of the opposition parties and the civil society there will be a greater degree of political instability in Turkey going forward.

Turkey's stated policy of 'zero problems with neighbours' aimed at building strong economic, political and, social ties with its immediate neighbours has floundered since the onset of the Arab Spring exposing the limitations of its hard power. Besides, its soft power has declined after the recent protests. Turkey has to address its own democratic shortcomings like lack of freedom of expression, minority rights and manipulating or browbeating the media. The protests in Turkey did not indicate that Erdogan's party is at a serious risk of losing power. The real problem seems to be that his popularity has gone to his head, probably under the impression that having won a majority at the ballot box he is entitled to take decisions unilaterally without considering the views of other groups in Turkey. In addition, the party is still suffering from a persecution complex.

Future of Political Islam

The Arab Spring created an opportunity for the Islamists to participate in politics openly. The Muslim Brotherhood made use of this opening to capture power. As it turns out their interpretation of democracy was to capture power through the ballot box and then act in an autocratic manner for pushing forth the Islamic agenda. The latest developments in Egypt do not necessarily represent rejection of Islam from politics. These in fact were more a reflection on nepotism, the incompetence of the Islamist regime and its efforts to monopolize power to the exclusion of others. At the time when Islam was being associated with terrorism and jihad, many countries were trying to address the feeling of hurt among the Muslims and finding a way to engage with Muslim countries. No country openly opposed Ennahda or the Brotherhood coming to power even if they did not prefer it. It was considered a better

option to integrate the Islamists into the political system and hoped that their political behaviour would be more responsible if they won power through the ballot box. The result is, however, not conclusive. Ennahda has behaved more responsibly while the Brotherhood has not. Libya is a separate issue in itself. In any case, it would be unwise to make a value judgement based on the performance and behaviour of previously untested Islamists assuming power in turbulent times in countries beset with serious economic, social and political problems.

Examination of the Turkish experience over the last decade will perhaps provide some evidence about the sustainability of political Islam. Sustained economic growth under his premiership has fetched Erdogan and his party credibility and popular support. He was wise in focussing on mending the economy before embarking on strengthening political Islam. It is difficult to foresee any political upheaval in Turkey for the present.

However, as recent events have indicated even Erdogan has not been able to find a perfect formula that balances Islam and democracy despite presiding over greater democratisation, economic resurgence and a higher international profile of Turkey. His growing authoritarian behaviour, political intolerance and Islamisation of politics have cast a shadow on the Turkish model of democracy. Use of harsh language against the protestors, including terming them as terrorists, hooligans and agents of foreign conspirators, and taking tough police action against them has dented the democratic credentials of the ruling party. Even though the protests in Istanbul have been controlled, there are problems ahead in constitution making and resolving the Kurdish issue. Unless Erdogan accommodates the views of the opposition parties and the civil society, there will be a greater degree of political instability in Turkey. However, despite scepticism, it can be safely said that Turkey represents a good model of success for political Islam. Religion will remain an essential and dominant part of politics in the Arab world for many years to come.

Conclusion

The Arab Spring has transcended many seasons and is likely to continue on its trajectory for many more. The trajectory will inevitably be uneven as the objective conditions in each of the countries in the region, their capacity to respond and the interests of the external players will vary in each case. Absence of any tradition of democracy or functioning political parties, the existence of internal social and sectarian divides, and high levels of religious orthodoxy prevailing in the region will prevent quick democratisation of the whole region.

The monarchies will resist the revolution affecting them by trying to confine the problem to other countries.

However, as events in Egypt and in Turkey indicate, no country will remain immune to the effects of the Arab spring. The sooner the ruling elites understand this, the more peaceful and controlled the transition will be.

International Community should Desist from Attempting to Tip the Balance

Sameena Hameed*

On December 17, 2010, 26-year-old Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi immolated himself in protest against prevailing political and economic conditions, igniting the Arab Spring. The civil protest spread across Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria; and armed revolt erupted in Libya and Syria. Within a few months, the governments in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt fell. President Salehi in Yemen was forced to resign after nearly nine month of fierce protests; and the resulting internal strife and division continue to create political instability. Even though it is two years since the onset of the Arab Spring, protests and violence continue unabated in Syria. In Bahrain, protestors continuously clash with security forces, frustrated over the slow pace of reforms and the stalled National Dialogue with the opposition parties. Egypt and Tunisia are again on the boil after their elected Islamic governments face a second wave of civil protest. Turkey, believed to have a liberal and secular polity in the Muslim world, also recently witnessed mass civil protests against brutal police action against demonstrators.

The Arab uprisings initially began as non-violent protests against autocratic, corrupt and audaciously repressive rulers; and the economic misery of the general masses contrasted with the way ruling elites lived in luxury. It was spearheaded by the younger generation and included the diverse sections of society. However, later they turned violent and even degenerated into sectarian conflicts and civil wars when the rebels were armed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the US-led West. The protestors generally demanded democratic governments, fundamental political, economic and social reforms and basic human freedom. Foreign policy issues were hardly raised and were generally devoid of anti-US and anti-Israeli sentiments. Soon, especially in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, it became an arena for acrimonious contestation between Saudi Arabia and Iran - to exert influence on sectarian grounds.

The traditional opponents of the authoritarian regimes in the region, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia, later joined the movement, only to soon hijack it for their own needs. The separatist movement in southern parts of Yemen also flared up during the 'uprisings'. The Shia upsurge in Bahrain and Yemen and the Sunni-dominated opposition in Syria

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became important drivers of the now transformed 'Arab Spring'. They shared common goals with the protesting youth and public – of overthrowing the authoritarian regimes but also had their own different visions. Nevertheless, even where minority oppositions were the fierce elements of civil protest, the general and inclusive character of the civil protest was quite evident.

The 'Arab Spring' has traversed a different course in Egypt and Tunisia where civil protests had not been fuelled by external actors. The elections, held post regime change, brought Islamist parties to power in these two countries. Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia did not ignite the revolution, though; it enabled their long banned, exiled and persecuted organisations to come out into the open. Their many years of suffering and suppression under autocratic regimes and their long organizational experience helped them to prevail over a host of fragmented newly-formed smaller parties. What is happening now is that, the people with a liberal agenda in these countries are preparing a second revolution against the attempt by their elected Islamist governments to exclude, or to commit excess on the liberals and the minorities in the drafting of their new constitutions.

The geopolitics of some of the Arab countries has been further complicated by the unprecedented political activism by GCC countries, collectively and individually, often in confrontation with each other. This is leading to, a protracted and fierce battle between the regime and the opposition led civil protest, as in Syria; or unabated violence where the regime change was brought through some form of external military support or negotiations, as in Libya and Yemen.

The Case of Syria

Violence spread in Syria when the Free Syrian Army (FSA), formed on July 29, 2011 started operating as the military wing of the opposition and trying to support civil protestors. It composed of a large number of former Syrian army personnel who had defected to the opposition. Soon the FSA started receiving military support from Turkey and Arab Gulf States, who already saw Iran and Hezbollah siding with Assad's forces. Syria has been Iran's longest standing and staunchest ally in the Arab world. It has been the main conduit of Iran's formidable influence in the Levant providing vital connectivity to support Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. If Assad's regime falls, Iran's ability to continue to project its influence in the region would be severely curtailed. Thus, Syria becomes the big prize in, what has turned out to be, a Saudi-Iranian confrontation.

Western and the other Gulf countries have been sharply critical of the Assad regime and have called for its replacement. They have been actively extending military and financial support to the opposition groups. The Syrian National Coalition, formed by different opposition groups, has now been recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people by over 114 countries including all Western and most Arab countries. This coalition includes strong Islamist elements and even Al Qaeda related groups but lacks representation of important minority groups, particularly the Alawites and Christians.

The Syrian 'uprising', at initial stages itself, acquired a sectarian character when the government reacted by targeting non-Alawite groups. The Alawite elements were armed and encouraged to launch attacks on Sunnis. As per reports, more than 90,000 people have been killed since March 2011, making the Syrian revolt the bloodiest of the all the Arab uprisings.

The opposition 'Prime Minister' Ghassan Hitto who was appointed in March 2013 by the Syrian National Council to head an interim government to administer areas seized by the rebels, has resigned. Hitto is mistrusted by other opposition members due to his perceived proximity to the Qatari-backed Muslim Brotherhood. A former Syrian political prisoner with close links to Saudi Arabia, Ahmad al-Jarba, was elected to lead the coalition. Rivalry between Qatar and Saudi Arabia who are vying for influence among the Sunni-dominated Syrian opposition has naturally weakened the opposition.

If the United States and allies genuinely want to change the course of the war in Syria, it may take considerably more than simply supplying the faltering opposition with weaponry. Russia and China have so far vetoed UN Security Council resolutions sanctioning external military intervention. The US has been carefully calibrating the extent of military support, without running the risk of heavy weaponry going into wrong hands. With fighting increasingly getting close to the Turkish border, a no-fly zone there might quickly degenerate into outright war with Syria.

The Situation in Libya

Libya too faced a prolonged civil war, with Western countries (along with some Arab allies) overtly supporting the opposition and covertly providing military assistance to the insurgents. This culminated in the gruesome death of the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, which also later was followed by widespread chaos. In July 2012, Libya held its first elections in almost 50

years. Moderate pro-business National Forces Alliance won an unexpected landslide victory against the Islamist parties. But violence continued unabated.

The country is infested by numerous armed militant groups, many of which are 'Salafists'. Former rebel fighters from different parts of Libya, who fought against Muammar Gaddafi are now jostling for power. The weak central government has struggled to impose its authority but has remained, by and large unsuccessful. Libya is now in danger of once again drifting into chaos and losing whatever progress that has been achieved. Among many other problems, instability has led to high unemployment and thus popular discontentment. The blatant attack on the US official facilities in Benghazi, that killed the US Ambassador and the attack on the interior ministry indicate rise of elements that need to be controlled. The government has set up mechanisms to disband armed groups, though this would not be an easy task.

The Story from Yemen

In March 2011, pro-democracy protests had erupted in Yemen against Ali Abdullah Saleh. Youth from all parts of Yemen flooded the Liberation Square at Sanaa. Even some major political parties declared their support for the youth uprising and there were cracks within his own government. In the following months, thousands were killed but proactive GCC mediation finally forced Ali Abdullah Saleh to leave after 33 years of rule. The Houthi movement also played an important role in forcing Saleh to step down. The divisive 'North vs. South' issues also got revived during these mass demonstrations – a subject that has been dormant for over two decades. Unified in 1990, North Yemen had absorbed the South in a civil war in 1994.

Two years after the Arab Spring, Yemen still seems to be 'in transition'. Violence has gripped parts of the central and southern regions of the country. The revived Southern secessionist movement has called for immediate autonomy, and subsequent independence, blaming economic and political marginalization by the North. Sanaa has called on the separatists to participate in national reconciliation talks. The talks have been stalled by sit-ins by representatives from the South – who have now hardened their stance and are insisting on 'independence'. The Houthis, who control parts of the north, are also engaged in reconciliation talks with the government, accusing the Government of violating their civil rights and disregarding their interests. Apprehension over the rising power of the Zaydi Shia-led Houthi group has given rise to the sectarian narrative, casting the Houthis as proxies in a regional battle between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The Absent 'Spring' in GCC Countries

In the GCC countries, the civil protest could not pose a serious challenge to the regimes. It is unlikely that these kingdoms will witness any dramatic change, though the process of reforms has been expedited and a huge financial package has been rolled out by the regimes. The existing patron-client relationship between the rulers and the citizens would continue. This scenario has been considerably strengthened by high oil prices. The people are generally enjoying far better conditions of life than their forefathers did and also better than anywhere else in the rest of the Arab world. People understand the chaos, death, destruction and economic collapse in other countries and are unlikely to risk their comfortable and peaceful lives.

The GCC countries, individually and collectively, have been playing uncharacteristically proactive and substantive roles in supporting and helping each other in protecting their regimes. Within weeks of protests starting in Tunisia and Egypt, the wave hit Bahrain. The protest in Bahrain was not originally sectarian in nature but was for equality, greater economic opportunity and political freedom for all its citizens. However, Saudi Arabia was immediately alarmed as Bahrain is only 20 km off its eastern seacoast, where its restive Shiite population lives. Saudi Arabia accused Iran of instigating the daily mass demonstrations and immediately dispatched troops to Bahrain invoking collective GCC security clause. The Bahraini regime, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries succeeded in diverting the attention from the need for reforms to the issue of Iranian support for the sectarian conflict. Bahrain became a front line in a region-wide tussle for influence between Shia Muslim Iran and Sunni Arab states.

The mass protests were crushed but Bahrain's Shia majority have continued with nominal protests, on an almost daily basis, demanding that the Sunni ruling family should announce elections and create a constitutional monarchy. The main opposition, the Wefaq movement, has managed to obtain nearly half the votes in the past parliamentary elections but the government has refused their demand to give the elected chamber of parliament the power of cabinet formation. The government initiated a National Dialogue among various political parties (including the opposition), the government and the parliament to discuss reforms and the various issues facing Bahrain. Over the past four months, the National Dialogue has been stalled due to procedural wrangles. Opposition organizations insist that procedural measures are a precondition for discussing political issues, whereas representatives of the 'Ten Societies Coalition', the parliament, and the government argue that issues relating to fair representation and the referendum must be kept off.

The GCC countries have now become confident players in the evolving developments in the Arab world in general and in West Asia in particular. They have been in the forefront in trying to shape politico-diplomatic events in Libya, Syria and Yemen. They very swiftly mended fences with the evolving power structures in Egypt, quickly overcoming their deep disappointment with the changes there and the US policy. They have been active in the Arab League and the UN. They have also extended financial aid to poorer Arab states to thwart popular discontentment. Qatar has been visibly assertive in Libya, Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

The 'Second Revolution' in Egypt and Tunisia

Egypt and Tunisia, where the civil society and the people in general have been the main drivers of the protests and have not experienced much external intervention, are witnessing further political activity perhaps leading to a second revolution. The current situation in Egypt clearly shows the uncompromisingly democratic and liberal aspirations of the people, as they have again arisen, this time against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Ennahda in Tunisia. The traditional parties are being challenged by movements with a more liberal agenda even in Turkey.

Hosni Mubarak was toppled by a popular revolt last year. The Muslim Brotherhood did not plan or start the current revolution. They were followers but became leaders in the end. President Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood leader steadily expanded his authority over the Arab world's biggest nation since he defeated an army-backed candidate in the elections. He diplomatically mediated truce ending a week of Israeli bombing of Gaza and Hamas rocket attacks on Israel, thus putting his stamp on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. The United States opened formal channels to the Muslim Brotherhood several months after Mubarak's overthrow. Mubarak had presented himself as the personal guarantor of the 1979 peace treaty with Israel for decades and after his overthrow, the US has been anxious over the views of the new regime. The Brotherhood leaders, long before the crisis, had spoken of rebalancing the Egyptian policy while keeping the ties with US strong – a development that calms these apprehensions.

However, President Morsi's handling of the domestic front had stirred stiff opposition from groups accusing the president of trying to monopolize power. The Brotherhood, on winning the referendum, conducted in December 2012, over the hurriedly drafted constitution believed that they could further enforce their views. The rocky road to the referendum had begun when

judiciary threatened to ban the constitution drafting assembly as the liberals, the Christians and other minority opposition groups had boycotted it. Morsi issued an edict in late November last year, declaring his decisions immune from judicial review until the holding of the constitutional referendum. The opposition saw it as a move to grab dictatorial powers and poured into the streets making Tahrir Square in central Cairo again the centre of public discontent. Morsi dropped his decree, but the situation remained tense and violence raged. Mohamed Morsi signed a decree enforcing Egypt's newly approved constitution after 63.8 per cent, voted in favour during the referendum. All the opposition parties felt threatened and closed ranks with the Mubarak loyalists into a united opposition. This unity, including the Copts, gave them the street power needed to begin a new revolution against the Muslim Brotherhood.

Egypt's street reverberated with pro and anti-Morsi protestors in the month of July 2013. In the capital, Cairo, the official building of the Muslim Brotherhood was set ablaze and people stormed and looted the building. Tamarod (meaning 'rebellion' in Arabic), the main opposition group gave Morsi a deadline of two days to quit or face civil disobedience. The Egyptian military had been cleansed of the old Mubarak loyalists and replaced with younger blood. They found themselves back in the streets with the tanks and tear gas, fighting the Egyptian people again. The Egyptian army gave an ultimatum to President Morsi to resolve the stand-off within 48 hours or face intervention. Morsi was later removed by the army and an interim structure set up. The expected resistance from the Islamist groups is threatening to tip Egypt into civil war. Terrorist attacks against the newly installed President Adly Mansour have already surfaced.

Tunisians started their own Tamarod on March 16 this year. Innumerable demonstrations took place in the country after prominent secular politician, Chokri Belaid was shot dead outside his home. The people demanded end of the rule of the Ennahda-led Islamist government, whom they accused of assassinating Belaid. The rallies led to the Tunisian Prime Minister, Hamadi Jebali, resigning from his position. The struggle for power has deepened animosity between the Islamists and liberals since the ouster of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali during the original Arab Spring uprising. The Ennahda managed to head off growing street protests and appease secular-minded parties by ushering in a coalition government in March that included several independent ministers. The Ennahda also accepted that sharia (Islamic law) will not be mentioned in Tunisia's new constitution, as demanded by the secular politicians. However, it still did not calm the people and they continue to

demand the ouster of the Ennahda party. The opposition group is accusing the Constituent Assembly charged with drafting a new constitution, of preparing the ground for a religious state and they aim to overturn it.

Unrest in Turkey

Istanbul's state of unrest began on May 27, when bulldozers began to uproot trees in Taksim Gezi Park situated in a historic downtown with plans to build a shopping centre. It outraged the people, who immediately began planting trees in response to the demolition of one of the few remaining green spaces in Istanbul. However, this protest soon expanded into a resistance movement in response to the police brutality. The state police continued to use excessive and disproportionate force to contain the disturbances. Turkey's Confederation of Public Workers Unions, KESK, consisting of eleven unions and approximately 240,000 members staged a massive two-day strike on June 04. According to the Interior Minister Muammer Guler about 939 people were arrested in over 90 separate demonstrations across the country.

The resistance was fuelled by rising discontent with the domestic policies of Erdogan's government and his support for the US-led proxy war in neighbouring Syria. The government was accused of waging one of the harshest crackdowns. The government's attempt to ban the sale of alcohol by the glass in public establishments was seen as a threat to secularism. The people also raised issues pertaining to commercialization and increasing neo-liberalization of the Turkish society and economy. The protests spread to about 67 cities across the country. There is also deep discontent particularly among the Alevi minority over Erdogan's collaboration with the far-right Sunni Islamist opposition in Syria.

Indian Response

India's response to the Arab Spring has been guided by the concerns for the welfare of its Diaspora, the protection of its access to energy and investment, maintaining stability at home, and, generally, re-enforcing principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention.

During the initial phase of the Arab Spring, India's top priority was ensuring safety of more than 400,000 Indians stranded in Egypt, Bahrain, Libya and Yemen. Successful evacuation needed the support of the incumbent governments. In Egypt and Libya, India had to negotiate with regimes that

were likely to be overthrown. Until its overseas citizen were evacuated, India exercised extreme caution and restraint in stating its official response to the Arab awakening, which eventually came on January 30, 2011, more than a week after protests began in Tahrir Square.

India was severely criticised for its 'indifference' and mute response in the early stages. India's caution and restraint was the mark of a mature state upholding the fundamental principle of non-intervention as it was too early to gauge and comment on the dynamics of internal matters of sovereign states.

Indian National Interest Supports Status Quo

Turmoil in the Arab region has, and would adversely affect India as it is dependent for about 85 per cent of its oil and gas imports from the region. Besides, the region is home to more than six million Indian Diaspora remitting about \$ 35 billion annually. In addition, in many ways, protests in Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen were moving away from the ideal of establishing democracy towards increasing polarisation and sectarianism. India does not approve of the emerging scenario.

India has a sizable population of both Sunni and Shia Muslims. The two sects have had a history of violent clashes in many parts of India. Hence, India refrains from publicly siding with the Shia and Alawite-backed Syrian regime or adhering to the views of the Sunni dominated Saudi Arabia. The secular republic of India is extremely sensitive about supporting any international initiative that could disturb equilibrium at home. In 2012, India abstained from a Saudi-drafted resolution that imposed sanctions on Syria and called for President Bashar Al Assad to step down.

The situation in West Asia is exceedingly fluid and uncertain. There are multiple players, both regional and non-regional, who are proactively involved. India has wisely refrained from any form of intervention or taking sides. It would have been counterproductive to India's relations with the GCC countries as the GCC countries for their own national interests have been proactive often in contestation with each other.

Saudi Arabia is the leading source of oil for India, having a share of 22 per cent, while Qatar is the largest supplier of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The Riyadh Declaration between King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the Indian prime minister had elevated the bilateral relationship to one of 'strategic partnership' embracing defence cooperation also. Extradition of two high profile terrorists to India by Saudi Arabia last year despite Pakistan's opposition

is a reflection of the strategic depth of this relationship. The GCC countries are making efforts to safeguard their interests amidst turmoil in their neighbourhood and would not appreciate any form of external intervention or positions upsetting their concerns in the region.

The GCC has an indispensable role in India's growth and development. Taking into account oil imports, two-way trade and remittances, India's ties with the GCC, Iran and Iraq, in financial terms, would be nearly \$200 billion, much more than India's ties with any other grouping such as the European Union, The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and North America

Establishing a workable balance in relations between India and Iran on the one hand and India and the GCC on the other is likely to be the most important challenge for India in West Asia in the next two to three years. Until recently, India used to be the second largest importer of crude oil from Iran. Iran also provides crucial trade routes to Central Asia, Russia and Afghanistan, enabling India to bypass Pakistan.

An understanding with Iran has been important for India, in the context of the emerging situation in Afghanistan also. The fierce rivalry between both Iran and Saudi Arabia for influence in shaping the future of the region is a relevant factor too. Strictly following the accepted principle of non-intervention and non-interference by extra-regional powers, can best serve India's national interest. At the same time, a workable balance acceptable to both the GCC and Iran should be explored and followed.

India has refused to extend a blanket endorsement to the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine (R2P), as it could be abused by external powers for intervention in the internal matters of sovereign states. It was concerned about its selective implementation in Libya and Syria, while overlooking similar situations in Bahrain and Yemen. It is also relevant to India's rejection of any sort of external intervention in its own internal conflict zones in North East and Jammu and Kashmir. India's stand has been vindicated in that any form of external intervention has proved to be disastrous and has led to huge civilian casualties during Arab Spring.

A clear pattern of external intervention leading to protracted civil wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen is evident. The Indian Government rightly refrained from voting on a UN Security Council Chapter VII Resolution that sought to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya.

India's positions, unfortunately, invites criticism about its inability to take a leadership role in international affairs, while it aspires for a permanent seat

at the UNSC. It is best that India leads by example; of being a successful, pluralistic, secular democracy; as the world's most diverse nation with a very large Islamic population and with a strong growing economy and as an example of an emerging player exercising restraint in the internal matters of sovereign states, even though it has high stakes in the welfare of these states. It can be the best model for inspiration and emulation for the young generations of Arabs.

As an influential member of an international community, it has engaged and empowered duly elected governments. India was quick to establish relations with the elected Islamic parties. Its relations and interaction with the new government in Egypt are better than those during the Mubarak regime. All over the Arab world, the governments are struggling to establish good governance in very difficult situations as their countries go through post revolution political trauma. India can help in training the police and army to improve security set up in Libya and Yemen. It can help in strengthening institutions of good governance, improve the electoral processes and the reconstruction of economies through trade and investment.

India should wait and watch developments in Egypt and Tunisia as they undergo a 'second revolution'. It has to avoid getting into situations that either directly appeases or impedes the interests of the Gulf States. This contribution to peace and stability in the Arab region through non-intervention, would not only serve its own national interests but also that of the Arab people.

Two years after the 'Arab Spring', it is evident, with the current rejection of the Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia, that the movement, originally devoid of any Islamic flavour, would revert to being just that – a revolution of all the peoples for a better tomorrow. The international community should desist from attempting to tip the balance in favour of any particular stakeholder.

The Second Egyptian Uprising: The Beginning of the End?

K. P. Fabian*

The 'Arab Spring' seems to have come a full circle. What happened in Egypt, wherein the 'popularly elected' government of President Morsi has been dismissed by the Military, seems to suggest that the haste, with which the new rulers had moved to bring about changes, has misfired. There are even comments that what we are seeing is the beginning of the end of the 'Arab Spring'. There are others who believe that this is just a part of the process and things will settle down, in due course. To correctly understand recent happenings in Egypt, it is necessary to recapitulate the sequence of developments that has led to the present situation. The story, as it has emerged from a perusal of reports in the Western media could be summarised as follows.

President Mohammed Morsi won the election narrowly, with less than 52% of the votes. He reneged on his promise to be President of all Egyptians and acted as the representative only of the Muslim Brotherhood. He pushed hard for a Sharia-based constitution in order to re-shape Egypt as an Islamic state. His promise to revive the failing economy was not carried out. According to his detractors, he exceeded his authority by arrogating a plenitude of powers to himself.

His proclamation of November 21, 2012, prompted analyst Nathan J Brown of the Carnegie Endowment to dramatise his statement as "I, Morsi, am all powerful and in my first act as being all powerful, I declare myself more powerful still. But, don't worry ... it's just for a while." Morsi appointed his party men to key posts. His choice as Governor of Luxor, to which foreign tourists flock, was a man who is believed to be an accomplice in a terrorist attack that killed dozens of such tourists years ago!

The large section of the people of Egypt wanted Morsi to leave. As per reports, they collected 15 to 22 million signatures; the pro-Morsi factions also mobilized in retaliation. There was a real risk of civil war and large scale violence that could bring ruin to Egypt. The Army decided to act. After giving an ultimatum to Morsi to heed to the 'people's demands', the Army deposed him, when he refused to resign.

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The Army has appointed an interim President. It was not a coup; the Army was only responding to the 'demands of the people', according to Mohammed El Baradei, the former chief of IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), who was subsequently appointed Vice President. The glorious January 25 Revolution 'hijacked' by the Muslim Brotherhood, has been reclaimed, it was stated.

There is much truth in the above narration. However, in the absence of full facts, an alternate narrative has emerged, that is far more comprehensive and very plausible.

Even after Mubarak fell in February 2011, a good deal of the structure that he had built up to support his autocracy remained intact. The components of that structure are the Army, the higher judiciary, and the security apparatus - including the police. The SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) had taken over on his departure but naturally did nothing to dismantle the autocratic structure. The Army announced a blueprint for handing over power to a duly elected civilian government within six months, but it had no intention of doing so. Egyptians had to go back to Tahrir Square and 45 of them were killed before the Army announced elections to the Parliament. That election was completed by January 2012; eleven months after the Army took over.

The election results, with the Muslim Brotherhood getting over 40% and the Salafists 25% of votes, did upset the Army. Judge Tahani el Gebali, Deputy President of Supreme Constitutional Court, was the Army's legal advisor. She had earlier counselled postponing of the election. As reported by *New York Times* on July 3, 2012, while the Army had initially disregarded her advice, after the elections and after seeing the results, they wished they had not!

The Parliament met, but it had no powers. The Army-appointed Prime Minister Kamal el-Ganzouri threatened Saad el Katatni, the Speaker, more than once, that he could get the Parliament dissolved by the Supreme Constitutional Court. The Army and the higher judiciary continued to work together to frustrate any movement towards genuine democracy. The Supreme Constitutional Court found faults with the election processes and the Parliament was dissolved in the middle of June 2012. That was the first blow to democracy by the Army.

The Army struck a second blow a few days later. It tightened its control of the political process by giving itself more powers, through a declaration on June 18th, when it appeared that the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Morsi was likely to win the second round of the presidential election. It gave itself the sole right to issue laws even after a new President was elected, took full

control of the national budget and claimed immunity from any oversight. The Army wanted to project itself as the guardian of the state as the Turkish Army did in the 1980s but did not trust the Muslim Brotherhood to take care of the Army's pre-eminence.

Thus, when Morsi took over as President, his office was bereft of powers normally associated with a head of state. It was inevitable that there eventually would be a clash between the Morsi Presidency and the Army. The clash came into the open in July 2012 when Morsi summoned the dissolved Parliament to meet. Once again, the Court overruled the President and he lost that round.

Morsi was biding his time. On August 5, 2012, the Egyptian border guards in Sinai were attacked, 16 were killed and two armoured cars were taken away. Morsi did not attend the funeral of the slain soldiers but his Prime Minister, Hasham Qandil, who was present, was attacked and his car was vandalized. Morsi decided to make use of the Sinai attack to clip the wings of the Army, it so seems.

On August 12, Field Marshal Tantawi, head of SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) and the Army chief General Sami Anan were 'invited to retire'. Morsi also abrogated the June 18 declaration of SCAF - that had given itself extra powers. The powers were transferred back to the Presidency till a new Parliament was elected. Finally, Morsi appointed General el-Sisi, 58, the chief of Army Intelligence as the new Defence Minister. Little did Morsi know that in less than ten months his own Defence Minister would depose him.

The Army reacted stoically to Morsi's coup, or so it appeared. Tantawi accepted his appointment as Advisor to the President. Thousands of Egyptians gathered at the Tahrir Square to express support for Morsi's coup. He himself thought that he had scored a definite victory. The media reported that younger officers were unhappy with the aging army leadership and also with the army getting involved with politics. It did not occur to Morsi that the generals were not accepting defeat and that they would strike at a time and in a manner of their choice.

Morsi's next aim was to complete the writing of the constitution. The Constituent Assembly was a divided house. The Islamists and the rest - mainly secularists and Coptic Christians, were not talking to each other. Many non-Islamists had walked out. The threat of dissolution by the court was hanging like a sword of Damocles over the Assembly. In order to pre-empt that threat, President Morsi issued his November 21 declaration, referred to earlier. There

were strong protests, and though Morsi rescinded it later, he did not do so before he got the Assembly to finalize the draft - which he put to a referendum in mid-December.

The majority of the electorate boycotted the referendum. Out of 52 million only 17 million voted. 10.9 million voted for the new constitution and the constitution was 'technically' approved. But, it was a Pyrrhic victory and Morsi should have known it. As the protests grew, Morsi was forced to call in the Army.

Meanwhile, the economy was in deep distress; there was shortage of petrol and wheat; tourism that accounted for 20% of the state's foreign currency earnings was down. One of the reasons for the fall in tourist arrivals was the incessant demonstrations in Tahrir Square and elsewhere. Morsi had signally failed to address other economic issues as well.

One other important factor was that Morsi never got full control over the police and other security forces – as many senior security officials refused to take orders from the Brotherhood, whom they had, for decades, treated as criminals and terrorists to be dealt with as such. Law and order deteriorated.

The Army intervened after the anti-Morsi agitation appeared to be growing and seemed unstoppable otherwise. The Army was looking for an opportunity to put an end to Morsi's presidency. Just to make sure that the agitation will get bigger and thus give them the necessary legitimacy, the Army gave a facetious 48 hour ultimatum to the President. There was no way Morsi could have talked to his opponents – who anyway refused to talk to him.

Did Morsi have a way out - which he failed to see? He might have announced an early presidential election, or reshuffled his cabinet, or perhaps even announced amendments to the constitution. It would not have worked as the Army wanted to remove him and was looking for an excuse. Morsi was well intentioned, but inexperienced and the Army outwitted him. This, in short, is the alternate narrative.

To better understand the situation, the importance of the role and clout of the Egyptian Army also needs to be noted. The Egyptian Army has a strength of 947,000 including reserves and it has an economic empire accounting for 25 to 40 percent of Egypt's GDP. According to Professor Khaled Fahmy of American University of Cairo, it is a "grey economy in the sense we know very little of it, it is not subject to any Parliamentary scrutiny (and) the Egyptian government and its audit offices have no control or knowledge of it." Mubarak left when he was asked by the Army to step down. The Army arranged for election only under popular pressure but soon regretted when the results

came out.

We do not know what the Army has in mind when it recently offered to open a dialogue with the Brotherhood. Observers feel that if it was serious about a dialogue it would have released Morsi immediately. There are sceptics who even feel that the Army wants the Brotherhood to resort to violence and using that as an excuse, to ban it once again and delay the holding of election. Such an approach would be a sure recipe for disaster.

The prospects for democracy in Egypt are not bright in the immediate future as there are no strong structures to support democracy. On the other hand, there are strong structures to support a dictatorship, as we have seen. The Brotherhood has shown astonishing political naiveté and has harmed itself in a big way. There was no hurry to rush through the new constitution. However, it remains the best organized political actor with a nationwide network - other than the Army, and it will be wrong to write it off. It also true that Egypt lacks charismatic leaders who are able and willing to work for a democratic Egypt.

'Unfallen' dictators in the Arab world can now be confident that they are in no imminent danger. President Basher al Assad's chances of survival have improved. Tunisia's Ennahda government will carefully assess the lessons to be learnt from Egypt's example. Though US has expressed its reservations about the military intervention, it has reason to be pleased with what has happened in Egypt and its likely impact on the rest of the Arab world. The on-going turmoil in Syria is also worth examining in some detail.

The Syrian Civil War

Basher Al Assad took office in 2000 succeeding his father, who had groomed him for the position. He had initially promised to reform the political system and to initiate democratic reforms, but soon went back on his promise. He was elected unopposed for a 7-year term in 2000 and 2007 in successive, *albeit* rigged elections.

Popular protests began on 15 March 2011, perhaps encouraged by the 'Arab Spring' elsewhere. When the Government responded with disproportionate force, the nature of the protests took a decisive turn, eventually leading to a civil war. Militarily, Assad's forces have scored victory in a few key areas. But, it is doubtful whether he will be able to score a decisive military victory. US has announced a decision to send lethal aid to the rebels, but is hesitating as it is worried that such aid might go to Al Qaeda

elements. US linked its decision with the alleged use of chemical weapons by Assad's forces. Assad's opponents are far from united. US tried and failed to get the Security Council to take action in the face of opposition from Russia and China. Iran has sent men to train Assad's forces and also to fight. So has Hezbollah. US is unable to stop Iraq from permitting the use of its airspace to Iran to send supplies to Syria. There is a visible Shia-Sunni divide in the region, with Iran and Hezbollah supporting Assad. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are openly supporting the rebels. Egypt under Morsi had supported the rebels, but that might change.

While the future of Syria cannot be predicted, it is painfully clear that the carnage would continue. The toll has crossed a hundred thousand mark, according to the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Civilian casualties account for 36% of the total, the government forces and the government supported militia accounting for 40% and the rebels accounting for the balance.

Yet another distressing factor is the increasing flow of refugees that has crossed the 1.5 million mark - 420,000 in Jordan, 300,000 in Turkey, 200,000 in Lebanon, 150,000 in Egypt, 100,000 in Iraqi Kurdistan, 25,000 in Algeria. Initial good will has faded. Those who argue that there should be Syrian-led solution forget that Syria is in the throes of a civil war and that the Syrians are not prepared to talk to each other. The government forces and the rebels have vied with each other in committing atrocities.

Effect on India

How has the continuing turmoil affected India and how has India reacted? One must remember that India is not an actor trying to influence the course of events, by supplying funds or weapons to one side in such conflicts, nor does it wish to play such a role. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that might have played a mediatory role is no longer active. In any case, in conflicts where great powers are engaged, as in the case of Syria, NAM can play a role only if the parties ask for it. On the other hand, India has historic and civilisational ties with the Arab world and has substantial economic interests in the region.

India's response to each of these popular uprisings has been varied. When President Ben Ali of Tunisia was ousted rather suddenly and there was hardly any external reaction. In case of Egypt, India was more concerned with the Diaspora. It did not react directly to the developments, but was busy evacuating

its nationals. India needed (and obtained) Egyptian cooperation in evacuating Indians working in Libya. After Mubarak left office, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, “If the people of Egypt want to move towards the process of democratization they have our good wishes and that is true of all countries...though we do not believe that it is our business to advise other countries we welcome the dawn of democracy.”

On Libya, India took the position that external intervention was “totally unacceptable and must not be resorted to.” India joined in the unanimous endorsement of UNSC Resolution 1970 extending sanctions on some Libyan officials and referring the situation to International Court of Justice. But, it abstained – did not oppose – UNSC Resolution 1973 that eventually led to military action by NATO. The India-Africa summit held in May, 2011 at Addis Ababa declared that NATO action was violative of SC Resolution. On Syria, India has opposed external intervention. In August 2011, when India presided over the Security Council, it worked successfully to prevent any resolution and the Council issued only a presidential statement. In December 2011, India abstained on a resolution at Human Rights Council proposing the establishment of a Special *Rapporteur* for Syria. On Bahrain, India merely expressed the hope for a peaceful resolution of the matter. India was obviously concerned about the 350,000 Indians who live there. In the case of Yemen India was more concerned with the safety of 14,000 Indians than with the outcome of the crisis.

Over all, India carefully balanced its interests, its support for democratic values, and its principle of non-intervention. India has started working with the new governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. India has had no special relationship with any of the ousted leaders. Also, what happens in the GCC countries is far more important to India. India took a cautious stand on Bahrain, not only because of the presence of a large Indian community but also because any prolonged turmoil in Bahrain can quickly and easily spread to the rest of the GCC - where there are over 6 million Indians. India’s import of oil from GCC is also a significant factor. India would prefer political stability and absence of discord in the Gulf.
