

Effect of arab spring on arab countries



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The 18th and 19th century witnessed the colonisation of majority of Arab countries. The discovery of oil in Persia in 1908 subsequently in Saudi Arabia in 1938 has been one of the significant development in the Arab world. France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. Though most of these states gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s, but the region has traditionally been characterized by dictators, hereditary monarchies, long serving military regimes and autocrats. These forms of rule deprived these countries from the winds of change .

11. The Arab countries are mostly deprived of Human Rights, lack of freedom of public opinion and expression, fear of regimes, corruption, favouritism and nepotism. Transparency has receded giving way to all sorts of malpractices and misuse of power. All this led to economic degradation and a fall in national income in most of the Arab countries during the past 60 years.

2 The main reasons for Arab Spring in mostly affected countries are as under:-

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(a) Tunisia. The revolution was sparked by a youth setting himself ablaze due to poverty and the resultant confrontation with security forces.

(b) Egypt. The movement was a call for better economic conditions and opposition to inheritance of power.

(c) Libya It was against suppression and the rule of one man without any political institutions.

(d) Yemen. it was against the dictatorship of one man and his tribe.

(e) Syria. It was against family and sectarian dictatorship.

3. Though this revolution was triggered by different factors specific to their own unique socio-economic and political structures but they have one unifying factor that they have been all youth-led movements.

2. However the roots of the Arab Spring lay in the following factors:-

(a) An entrenched dictatorship/autocracy/monarchy vs the people's desire for freedom and democracy.

(b) Widespread corruption on the part of the ruling elite.

Frequent violation of human rights and brutal repression by the national security force.

The rich – poor divide getting wider.

High cost of living that was constantly on the rise and low income.

Lack of adequate job opportunities and the high rate of unemployment among the educated youth.

Rejection of the idea of the “ inheritance” of presidency.

Social network media namely, facebook and twitter , which served to rally the youth.

3. There has been a monarchical exception in the Arab Spring which makes one believe that monarchies could be more resilient during popular unrest. With the exception of Bahrain to an extent , other monarchies were not seriously affected. Arab Spring has brought to fore the role of monarchy in regime stability also.

2. The Arab Spring has altered the politics in the Arab world by bringing new political forces. The Islamists have emerged as political parties in Egypt and Tunisia. It can concluded that Islamists have been the real gainers of the undergoing socio-political transformation.

Tunisia

2. In Tunisia, the formulation of a new constitution is by now under way after the termination of election for the Constituent Assembly in October 2011. Tunisia also witnessed the arrival of the Islamists in the power struggle after decades of alienation by Ben Ali. Tunisia was the first country to observe regime change when the Islamic An-Nahda party won the majority of votes. Hamadi Jebali, Secretary General of An-Nahda, is the new Prime Minister and the Islamic party is presently working in close alliance with Progressive Democratic Party. Though at present their roadmap is devoid of any Islamic

rhetoric, it is concentrating more on the model of civic governance. The biggest challenge to Tunisian democracy is likely to be from the Salfists who represent the Islamic fundamentalists.

Egypt

2. The Freedom and Justice Party, a political arm of Muslim Brotherhood, has made a clean sweep in the Parliamentary elections, but the liberals failed to make an impact in the first ever fair election. The departure of the army from the helm of the affairs also brings to an end to the era of ruler-army nexus in Egypt. It is not only Muslim Brotherhood which gained ground, but there other Islamic groups like the Salafists have also risen to a considerable position and are dominating national politics. So far, the Islamists have adopted the strategy of adjustment. The surfacing of several liberal parties like Third Current, Free Egyptian Party, Egyptian Social Democratic Party and the Tagammu Party is a positive sign and signals evolution of a multi-party system which had been absent for decades. Presently Mohamed Morsi has been elected as the new president in June 2012 but he has grabbed unbridled power for himself, which has led to violent outburst from the masses in the country.

Libya

2. The departure of Colonel Gaddafi after the involvement of the NATO set the stage for democratic practice in the country. In July, 2012, the election was held for the General National Congress, the first democratic election in Libya in half a century. In contrast to Egypt and Tunisia, in the Libyan election, liberal forces won the elections. The poor show of the Islamists may be accredited to the time-honored Sufi character of Libyan Islam and

people's non-proclivity towards Islamic brand of politics. In addition, during Gaddafi's regime, most of Islamist never surfaced and were also not organised like Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt or An-Nahda of Tunisia.

3. The democratic process in Libya has been unsuccessful in bringing about the political solidity such as the one in Egypt or Tunisia. The country has turned out to be more delicate and vulnerable. It is also the tribal character of society in Libya that is causing disintegration and disorder of the social fabrics. Libyan society is now both horizontally and vertically disjointed and neo-tribalism has replaced the old national uniqueness and loyalty.

Morocco

3. Political concessions approved by King Mohammed VI led to referendum on constitutional reforms. In dissimilarity with protesters in other countries, the Moroccans who initiated the Feb 20 movement for transformation have not voiced for the king's overthrow. Instead, their focal point has been on significant constitutional reforms, which restricts the powers of the king and consolidates the theory of separation of powers. The demonstrations right through the country have been generally peaceful and free of violent expression.

2. Similarly, in the recent elections too, the Islamist won the majority of seats and the King designated Abdelilah Benkirane, an Islamist figure, as Prime Minister. The delicate balance is to be seen between the monarchy and the new Islamists forces, and how they are adjusted in national politics. The King has by now initiated a major political reform capable of empowerment of the people.

Syria

4. The Syrian National Council an opposition government formed in exile has not been recognized by the Western & Arab nations due to the council's internal divisions. Syria was expelled from the Arab League after it agreed to a peace plan only to step up attacks on protesters. In late 2011 and early 2012, Syria agreed to allow league observers into the country but their presence did nothing to slow the violence. In February 2012, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to approve a resolution condemning President Assad's unbridled crackdown on the uprising, but China and Russia, Syria's traditional patrons, blocked all efforts for stronger Security Council action. Iran, Syria's closest ally in the region, also doubled down on its support for Mr. Assad. The conflict is becoming more radicalized, homegrown Muslim jihadists, as well as small groups of fighters from Al Qaeda, have been taking a more prominent role and demanding a say in running the resistance. Recent months have witnessed the emergence of larger, more organized and better armed Syrian militant organizations pushing an agenda based on jihad. As the conflict has continued without resolution, the Assad regime has lost many key players, as growing numbers of high-ranking government and military officials have defected. In early August 2012, President Assad fired his prime minister, RiyadFarid Hijab who defected to neighboring Jordan. Days after Mr Hijab's defection, Mr Assad appointed a new prime minister, Wael Nader al-Halqi.

2. Except for Syria, nearly each country affected by the Arab Spring is steadily moving towards some sort of stability. The bloodiest upshot of the Arab Spring has been the incessant war in Syria. Syria is subject to Sunni-

Alawite conflict but the Arab Spring has aggravated the crisis. The continuing civil war between Free Syrian Army, the main umbrella group for fighters & the Syrian Army has resulted in the death of more than 30, 000 people. By September 2012, 2, 34, 000 Syrian refugees had registered in neighboring countries about half of whom left during August. The end of continuing unrest is nowhere in sight[1].

The violent clashes between the regime and the rebels reflect the deep hatred between the Sunni majority and the ruling Alwite minority. Syrian civil war has all the potential to become the scene of an international conflict. So far, no endeavor, including the U. N.-Arab League Mission led by Kofi Annan, could contain this strife. Even the new U. N.-Arab League envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi confessed that he was not certain that he would be able to end the conflict.

Yemen

5. President Saleh signed the GCC sponsored peace process on 23 Nov 11, in which he agreed to step down and set the stage for transfer of power to his vice president. A presidential election was held on 21 Feb 12 in which AbdRabbuh Mansur Al-Hadi (the only candidate) won 99. 8% of vote. The new president has been mandated to lead a two year political transition process including a fully inclusive National Dialogue, constitutional & electoral reforms ending with full Presidential & Parliamentary elections in 2014[2]. In addition monetary assistance has been received from World Bank to improve the economic condition. The developments as of now put an end to more than 12 months of violence & civil unrest across Yemen.

2. After the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) mediated an agreement between the opposition groups and President Abdullah Saleh to leave the Presidency, Yemen underwent the Presidential election in February 2012 and acting President Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi won 99.8% of vote and was elected as the President. But the elections have failed to amalgamate a society that is divided by cultural and tribal loyalties. The Houthis, an insurgent Shiite group, boycotted the elections which reflects the political division in Yemen and leaves enough room for trouble in future. In addition new governance could not rein in the new resurgent groups operating in the name of north-south and sectarian entity.

Bahrain

5. Bahrain's political arrangement has been unable to keep tempo with demands for representation for the majority Shia population and has almost responded to unrest with an iron fist[3]. King Hamad did attempt to provide some amount of economic concession by giving out financial relief to each Bahraini family & also initiated judicial, security & economic measures. However as per Amnesty report, these reforms appear to have scratched the surface as human rights crisis still continue[4]. During the unrest, the old sectarian fault lines between Shiites and Sunnis surfaced. To soothe anti-government protestors, the King dismissed several cabinet ministers and pardoned political prisoners, including the Shia opposition leader Hassan Mushaimaa, who had been in exile in Lebanon.

2. The condition in Bahrain can be seen in similarity to that in Syria where minority Sunnis rule over majority Shiites. It was GCC under the direction of

Saudi Arabia which suppressed the revolt in Bahrain. Besides, Bahrain has also turned out to be a battle ground of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia..

2. The situation at hand appears to be calm but one cannot rule out the likelihood of repetition in the near future because of the unpredictable nature of the region. Furthermore, Iran may endeavor to capitalise on the amplified sectarian tension.

Jordan

5. Subsequent to the initial protest the government upturned the rise in fuel prices, but protestors still persisted with their demands for reforms. The King in an attempt to soothe the masses have dismissed three prime ministers from the time when the of Arab Spring started, finally paving way for Fayed al- Tarawneh to head the cabinet to deliver reform agenda[5]. Frequent and small scale protests and turmoil still continues in Jordan to keep the system off balance.

Saudi Arabia

5. Saudi Arabia is also transiting through ‘ low level’ sectarian conflict. The Shiite minority in the eastern part is making recurrent protests seeking rights and freedom. The king dolled out economic concessions in the form of US \$ 130 billion. Subsequently Municipal elections were held in Sep 2011. Reforms were also initiated for women’s participation in municipal election in 2015 and for their nomination to Consultative Assembly.

Oman

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6. Political reforms were announced in reaction to the spate of protests. The most noteworthy reforms include the granting of Consultative Council (Majilis) of Oman ample legislative and audit powers[6]. Sultan Qaboos reorganized the Council of Ministers and replaced three top administration officials. A new body was also shaped to manage the country's economy while Sultan Qaboos promised extra 50, 000 jobs[7]. The generally affirmative Omani views of Sultan Qaboos, attached with the economic and supplementary political reform measures caused the unrest to subside.

Kuwait

5. As a consequence of the protests that demanded political transparency and a clamp down on corruption within the government, the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, resigned on 29 Nov 2011. The government used financial generosity like budgets laden with subsidies and salary increases as well as used oppressive measures in terms of imprisonment which kept the public display of dissent relatively restricted. As Kuwait is a relatively wealthy society where it appears that most citizens do not want to risk their economic wellbeing to bring the downfall of Al Sabah rule[8].

2. From the events as it unfolds in Arab world , it can be generalized that the historic phenomenon of Arab Spring reflects the following which has wide implications for non- Arab countries also :-

(a) The ' deep structural malisie' of Arab society in general.

(b) The democratic aspiration of the marginalised section of Arab society, particularly the youth, for a dignified livelihood, a kind of social, economic and political reform that ensures respect for individual identity, dignity and social equity.

(c) The inspiration for this movement is deeply Arab-Islamic, rather than tradition of western democracy and therefore eventhough the movement aspires for ' democratic space' but it does not necessarily imagine this democractic space in terms of western democratic values and principles.

(d) It is the rainbow of multiple ideological currents vis islamism, nationalism, tribalism, sectarianism and localism with each competing with each other for representation in future power-arrangement but also uniting for loosely defined national purpose against external challanges.

(e) The movement is likely to have long term implication for the stability and security of the region.

(f) The relatively peaceful, leaderless, unorganised but having mass element only reienforces the notion that people remains the motor of wider social and political changes and in the process totally delegitimise the violence-prone politics and discourses of radical/militant Islamic organisations in the name of ' islamic' transformation of Muslim societies.