The Arab Spring One Year Later:
Assessment of the Historical Impact and Emanating Trends for 2012

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As the world continues to consider and understand recent events in the Arab world, some have used the words “revolution” and “tsunami” to describe what has happened and the term “Arab Spring” has become more popular over the last year of the Arab unrest. According to politicians, these far-reaching movements are singularly the most important political event shaping the 21st century and modern history.

The Second Round of the Arab Spring;

Surprises in the Arab world could still be in store, and attempts to reflect on what has happened and correct and revise assessments will take a long time without drawing any final conclusions. It is worth examining these events as they are and asking why it is that they are happening now and how long will it take to actually bring to fruition the revolutionary gains made, or on the contrary, to realize just how fragile they are. Or even confirm their failure.

The Arab revolutions took place for plenty of obvious reasons, but nonetheless, no one saw them coming. No one saw the last straw that broke the back of the stability on which Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and other countries balanced. While there are six reasons for the flurry of developments in the Arab world: “rampant corruption, the gap between rich and poor, high unemployment, lack of prospects for young people to realize their potential, lack of democratic rights and freedoms, and rising food prices.”, there are also other two reasons; regimes’ stagnation and people’s tiredness of the regime and particular leader that eventually pushed people from various quarters of society to the streets, especially the youth.

The question here is: When the “second round” in the revolutionary cycle is likely to start! While the principal social and economic reasons that have already caused uprisings in the first place are still remaining in most of the Arab countries!

The new authorities in Egypt and Tunisia, and, clearly, in Libya and Yemen, as well as the old authorities in Syria, Algeria, Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco, and elsewhere, will have to carry out the major reforms they have promised. Although that they ran out of time to act, and real far-reaching reforms always come at a social cost, at least temporarily. Given that reforms will inevitably weaken their control over society.

All of this makes it highly likely that coming up or actual revolutionary situations will either continue or emerge in these countries. Hence, both carrying out reforms and not carrying out reforms will make the internal political situation more tense and less stable, which will make a “second round” of upheavals.

Another question is: Who will give it real substance and turn today’s formal democratic institutions into real and effective ones, and how? And who will guarantee honest elections; the army or outside forces?
The Islamic radicals whose political activity is on the rise could take advantage of the new democratization. That democratic procedures open the door to Islamists has been amply demonstrated by the success of Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and radical groups in Pakistan. Honest elections in Afghanistan could bring success for the Taliban. Islamic parties and movements in such countries as Egypt (the Muslim Brotherhood) and perhaps Syria and the Persian Gulf countries, not to mention al-Qaeda supporters in Yemen, whose number exceeds tens of thousands, are all likely to make use of a good opportunity. The “second round” could bring the reconstruction of new authoritarian regimes with charismatic leaders at their head.

This would be no surprise, as people tend to look for and place their hopes in such leaders during critical situations. A hypothetical new “father of the nation” would make ready use of religious slogans, in particular calling for justice in the name of Islam. Authoritarian government is still the norm in most Muslim countries, and so observers should not hope too much for rapid change in their political culture and public awareness.

One more question worth reflecting on is whether something like the “Arab Spring” could happen in the Persian Gulf countries?

The monarchies there are stable, and have learned how to use their oil resources for their economic development. The common view is that a social explosion in the region is very unlikely. But these countries also have a large number of young people. Social networks exist there, and the share of people with Internet access is similar or even exceeds the numbers in the unstable countries. Finally, these monarchies are engaged in a constant fight with local Islamic radicals. Consequently, the chances that the region’s regimes can keep ruling interminably are more debatable than they might look.

The Influence of the “Arab Spring” on the Middle East Conflict;

There has not been much impact so far. Arab countries are caught up in their own internal affairs, and some regimes exploit Palestinian-Israeli relations more as a means of resolving their own internal difficulties than out of pressing concern for the Palestinian people. The “ebb and flow” of Middle East passions and periodic flare-ups bring to mind the well-known words of Yasser Arafat, who said that “Arab women’s wombs”, demography, in other words, would ultimately decide the conflict.

Perhaps this matter of growing Arab and Muslim demographic pressure—like an approaching asteroid, is an indirect and tacit but understandable reason nudging the United States to rethink its policy in the Middle East. The situation in the Middle East will most likely heat up during the “second round” of the “Arab Spring” for two reasons. First, because the radical Islamists, for whom the Arab-Israeli confrontation is a particularly sensitive issue, will become more active, and second, because political regimes under threat could try to divert attention toward Israel and Palestine instead.

The Turkish Model;

Of course, many other important issues will determine the path the Arab world takes, such as Turkey’s new course in the Middle East, the attempts by some Arab countries to make use of
Turkey’s experience, Iran’s position, and the influence the Arab revolutions could have on the rest of the Muslim world, in particular Central Asia. But then again, serious discussion on the present and future of the Arabs and the Muslims in general, the depth of changes taking place, and also the possible consequences and reversals, is only now beginning.

Trends Emanated from the Arab Spring;

There are three trends which are significant and highly demonstrated throughout the events of the Arab Spring: First, nearly all the movements have involved youth and youth is involved because youth feels deprived: It is deprived of work, it is deprived of opportunities for a normal life, and it is deprived of all the essential services that populations require because of the poverty of the region.

Another important trend has been the way that the demonstrations have been peaceful. That was a surprise; no one anticipated that that would be the case. But it has been the case on the parts of the population concerned. In almost every case except Libya those populations have demonstrated peacefully. They may have been met by armies, they may have been killed, but they have maintained that peaceful disposition.

And the third important trend is the great positive thing that has emanated from the Arab Spring, which is the increased pressure on Western state governments to critically revise its exploitative relationship it has had with MENA dictators. At a severe cost to its hegemonic status, the US and its allies need to be economically and diplomatically responsive to the will of the Arab population, not the dictators who are simply on the wrong side of History.

Putting these trends into consideration and working on its development will probably allow for some progress for the Arab spring to achieve its principal goals.

In conclusion, the Historical importance of the Arab Spring is somewhat tentative. The rampancy of civil disobedience is certainly a positive step towards a transition to democracy. But, thus far, we have seen no signs of authentic regime change. Personnel may have altered (Ben Ali, Mubarak, and potentially Kaddafi), but the socio-political system that enables the predominance of authoritarianism is still firmly in place. Moreover, there has been little discussion of a full implementation of Arab-style rule of law, which will place binding constraints on every political leader. Until these structurally important factors are confronted both internally and externally, MENA democratisation will always be doubtful.
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