

# Indian Council of World Affairs

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## View Point

### Emerging Scenario in the Arab World

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A great tide of anger, frustration, defiance, with demands for freedom, liberty, equality and national dignity is sweeping across the Arab world. Some of the regimes have already succumbed to people's pressure like in Tunisia and Egypt while some other regimes are still struggling hard to remain in power like in Syria and Yemen.

The democratic upsurge of the Arab people is an expression of the common men seeking dignity and respect they never experienced in decades. The turmoil, also being referred to as Arab Spring, is a symptomatic of deep social, economic and political malaise affecting the region for a long time. This is an outburst against the entrenched totalitarian and despotic political system which has failed to fulfil the aspirations of the masses. The people have been deprived of good governance as nepotism and co-optism had been the rule of governance until now. These regimes scuttled all oppositional voices and played fraudulent with the political institutions, and acted like a hegemon and western agents.

The global communities have reacted differently to the uprisings sweeping throughout the Arab landscape taking into account their varied interest with these countries. For example, Syria may have Iran's support in managing the people's defiance, an expression of Shiite solidarity. Both Russia and China have already vetoed the UN Security Council Resolution against it for a number of tactical reasons apart from the economic one. While some of the Arab states and EU countries, for its

own strategic reasons, have broken its diplomatic ties with Syria. The same block of the Arab countries maintained complete silence in case of Bahrain and Libya.

The situations in some countries are returning to normalcy like in Egypt and Tunisia where hectic efforts are being made to bring about political stability after an extensive period of political upheaval as elections are round the corner in these two states. The whole of global community is keen to see the outcome of this new political process that will decide the future political discourse.

A lot of political speculations and anticipations are going around the outcome of these elections. One common feature of these speculations is the constant fear of capture of power by the Islamic fundamentalist forces in these elections. In Egypt, Coptic Christians are highly frightened of the Islamic backlash in case of Islamists taking the reign of power. There are already reports of Muslim-Christian riots in some part of the city of Cairo.

The situation is quite similar in Tunisia where people at large harbour apprehensions vis-a-vis the Islamists notwithstanding the repeated assurances from the chief Islamic Ideologue of Tunisia, Ghannouchi who had announced at numerous occasions that a mild form of Shariah would be implemented. He further added that the land of Africa had never been an alien to the rule of Shariah

But in Syria, there seems to be no sign of an early let-up in the brutal treatments of the protestors on part of the regime where thousands have already fled their homes and more than three thousands have been killed so far. In Libya, the situations are very much in a flux as some parts of country are still witnessing the battle between the opponents and remnants of Gaddafi's force despite the claim of the NATO force that base of Gaddafi's power structure had been completely dismantled. The newly formed Libyan National Council has been recognised by almost all the countries but they have yet to start the reconstruction process of new political arrangement for Libya

### **The Future Scenario**

The Arab crescent, an arc of states bordering the Mediterranean and the Red Sea is in state of flux and it is too early to assess the full strategic impact on the region but one thing can be said with certainty that regional politics will never be the same after this' Arab political Tsunami.

The present turmoil in the region has its own indigenous impulses which are quite domestic in character that can be seen through the prism of a common man's cry for freedom, liberty, equality and national sovereignty. The yearning for democracy will be difficult to deny now and the Arabs too could aspire for freedom and justice.

Every-day protests and strikes in different Arab cities have sent a stern message to the rulers of the region that transfer of authority from the barracks to the masses can no longer be eschewed. This will naturally lead to a new kind of covenant between the state and people of the respective nation which was so far devoid of the minimum democratic elements. Given the democratic urge of the common man, people will no longer be bound by the client-patron relationship and in future they will claim full share in power through democratic mechanism.

There will be profound shift towards political transformation resulting into greater democracy and better governance ushering into an era of prosperity, freedom and liberty like others enjoy in the developed world.

For any political formation in near future, it would be difficult to ignore the aspirations of the masses and post-Arab spring era is expected to be an era of democracy where a civil society will be allowed to evolve and a module of governance will be designed suitable to the needs and ambitions of the citizens.

The rebellious multitudes have laid to rest the myth that Muslim masses can be mobilized only through religious exhortation. The absence of Islamic rhetoric throughout the movement was, if not shocking, surprising for all those who have harboured an apprehension that any political vacuum will be taken over by Islamist forces. To quote Oliver Roy, an eminent Islamic sociologist, "The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia show that Islam is now less potent politically, even as its social dominance grows"

A truth has emerged that people's hunger for democracy cannot be matched with people's thirst for Islamism. Islamist force will remain there as an indispensable entity but with different roles where they will be confined to socio-cultural sphere. Given the people's mood at present, Islamist will not seek greater political role for themselves and at the most they might act as a strong pressure group and cannot be in the driving seat.

Given the commonality in the pain and the plight of the masses and the resemblance of voices against their rulers in the contiguous Arab region, it might also be inferred that this phase of turbulence and upheaval will be followed by re-emergence of another wave of Pan-Arabism that had collapsed after the 1967 defeat in the Six-Day war against Israel.

In the near future, a situation may arise when each nation witnessing this turmoil in the region would have to redesign its foreign policy echoing the resonance of the wishes of the people. In Egypt, for instance, amid the protest itself there were strong voices calling for the abrogation of the Camp David Agreement adducing it as an instrument of foreign imposition. There are calls in Egypt to end the commitment to sell oil and gas to Israel. These events signal what may occur elsewhere as Arab autocrats topple and long suppressed public opinion, rich with anti-Israeli grievances, is un-locked.

The defiant mood of the people on the Arab street is an absolute gesture that people want a dignified place for their country in the comity of the nations and would endeavour to put country's interest with global order along an equal basis and in an honourable manner.

One cannot also discount the worst case scenario where one can experience domestic strife for a longer period of time as in the case of Yemen and Libya, a tribally structured society. One cannot also rule out the escalation in an inter-state conflict (Turkey-Syria) and fragmentation of nations on tribal and ethnic lines. This democratic wave might cause further sectarian division (Syria is the case) which in

long term may be pushed towards a new kind of political structure reflecting the ethnic and sectarian split on the model of Lebanon and Iraq.

These are a few of the future expected scenarios that might emerge in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. These scenarios will have its bearing on domestic, regional and global level affecting all political dispensations in the region.

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