

Tunisia and Egypt

Implications for India's Neighbourhood

Jawaid Akhtar and J Jeganaathan

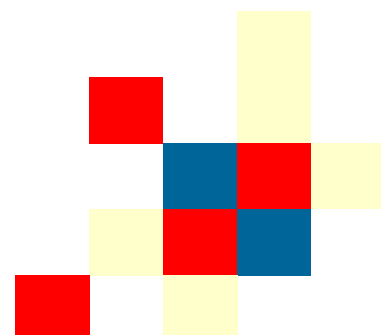


*Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies in
collaboration with the India International Centre*



B-7/3, Safdarjung Enclave
New Delhi 110029
91-11-4100 1900

www.ipcs.org



Tunisia and Egypt

Implications for India's Neighbourhood

Report of a Panel Discussion organized by the IPCS in collaboration with the India International Centre (IIC) on 14 February 2011

Introduction

Prof. Amitabh Mattoo

The events in Egypt preceded by Tunisia are in many ways unprecedented. There were many instant judgments and conclusions about wider implications of these events for other regions particularly in South Asia. As far as implications for India are concerned, a debate on whether such replications could be seen in Kashmir during summer has already begun, as one of the opposition leaders in the state suggested that the people of Kashmir should react the way Egyptians did in the last few weeks. The following discussion by the experts of the subject will reflect on these contemporary issues and its broader dimension.

Prof. P R Chari

The recent events in Egypt and Tunisia show that people's power will assert itself in one way or other. Most of the Middle-East countries are ruled by monarchs for ages and some part of the Arab world is still unrepresented. Whether people's power will assert in these regions is the key question for the debate. Also, probably in the case of Egypt whether the ouster of President Mubarak really means that in some way or the other or background or foreground the Egyptian military will take charge of affairs. And, whether if this movement spreads to the other countries, the same pattern of military replacing autocrats may prevail and do the business as usual. The other pattern may be the Islamisation of the region. As the country on our west is already imploding, it will have implications for India. The following deliberations will help us to conceptualize the effects of the Egyptian revolution and its implications for India's neighbourhood.

What is happening in Africa? From Tunisia to Egypt?

Prof. A K Rama Krishnan

There are a few things that need to be highlighted about what is going on in the region for the past few weeks from Tunisia to Egypt and Algeria. One major aspect is the role of media which underscored the salient features of the crisis such as role of youth and the leaderless kind of movement particularly in Egypt. However, one element that is missing in their discussion is the fact that this is not a sudden development rather it has strong historical and political background. For instance the major factor for the political engagement of the youth is the evolution of what can be called the "Arab Public Sphere", which is transnational in characteristics. The youth engagement on political issues is not because of social networking or for social purpose rather it has some similarity with early 'Arab Nationalism'. So what was happening in the last decade or more than an year before is the generation of a sense of political community among the Arab's through the new media that provided an opportunity to redefine their citizenship. This citizenship in new way simply means that one should look at one's own citizenship in a democratic way. Therefore, a political community of Arabs based on democratic citizenship with pan-Arabian sense is being built up in recent times. And what we see is the expression of the political will of the people asserting their democratic citizenship. This is extremely significant in the case of Egypt and to a large extent to Tunisia and Algeria as well. Because the implications of the political dynamics that it produces may have some ingredients of Islam. Interestingly, these movements had not only challenged the monopoly of power by the autocrats like Mubarak and Ali but also have challenged the monopoly of the opposition

© 2010, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS)

The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies is not responsible for the facts, views or opinion expressed by the author.

The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), established in August 1996, is an independent think tank devoted to research on peace and security from a South Asian perspective.

Its aim is to develop a comprehensive and alternative framework for peace and security in the region catering to the changing demands of national, regional and global security.

Address:
B 7/3 Lower Ground Floor
Safdarjung Enclave
New Delhi 110029
INDIA

Tel: 91-11-4100 1900, 4165 2556,
4165 2557

parties characterized by the Muslim Brotherhood. However, this does not mean that Muslim Brotherhood will be out of the picture, rather it will definitely play a crucial role in Arab politics which will eventually depend upon the factor that to what extent it can redefine itself along with the democratic citizenship that has been discussed. Given the kind of organizational flexibility and diversity the Muslim Brotherhood has, it has the potential to change according to the newly emerged citizenship perceptions.

One of the positive outcome of the crisis is the emergence of 'democratic citizenship imagination' in the Arab world which is unique and strong. This kind of citizenship imagination has longer history and closely associated with the evolution of civil society movements in the Arab world. For example feminist movements in the early 1920s were strong and vibrant in Egypt and in the recent times the well organized trade unions along political lines which confront state in various ways. This shows that the democratic movements exist and have sustained themselves all these years. However, with the ousting of Mubarak's autocratic regime the Egyptian political system is at crossroads now. Where is the power shifting to- Dynasty or Republic? Prof. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a strong critic of Mubarak described the future regime of Egypt and Libya as '*Jumlukia*'; a combination of Republic and Monarchy which is also seen in Syria. Interestingly, the factors such as the citizenship imagination indicate that the current Egyptian political system is moving towards more diversity than it had earlier. But, one cannot underestimate the role of military, which is at the fulcrum of this transition and has proved its credibility by siding with the people. Therefore, the future of Egypt would depend upon to what extent the pressure of the streets is kept intact? It has to come again and again. Lastly, the economic reality in which the current crisis is happening should be taken into account while drafting a new political system. For India, It is highly significant to recognize the kind of interaction between the people of the new generation within a region in order to have a positive response not only to the contemporary events but also to what happens in future.

Will the Unrest spread to the rest of Arab World in the Middle East?

Prof. P R Kumaraswamy

Almost all the countries in the Middle East have been ruled by monarchs since ages. The idea of democracy, the rule of law, accountability and civil rights are alien to this region. The events in Tunisia followed by Egypt have thus shaken the region and the winds of political change are still blowing. So it is inevitable that what is happening in Tunisia and Egypt will affect the entire Middle East including the non-Arab countries such as Turkey and Iran. The common question here is what should one look for in these developments? There are four points that stand out from a brief analysis of these developments. First and foremost is to know what is the role of army in both the cases, and Egypt in particular. The role of military is very crucial in shaping the outcome of the events. In both the cases the leaders were ousted when the military switched its side from the current ruling government to the people's side -first in Tunisia and then in Egypt. The army reversed its loyalty towards people because there was no democracy and accountability in the regime. The leaders of these countries also have military background except Syria. So the moment military find itself uncomfortable with the regime or feel that the regime is losing its legitimacy due to mass upheaval, the leaders will be either ousted or dumped. Therefore, the first thing one should look at in these developments is the role of military. Will the leaders command the loyalty of army at the time of crisis? Officially, the answer is no for Egypt and Tunisia.

Second interesting thing to be learned from these events is the nature of the movement itself. Surprisingly, the mass movement that toppled the leaders of the two countries were led in peaceful way without any major violence or clashes. In the Egyptian case the movement was by and large peaceful and the protesters adapted non-violent strategies to oust the ruler unlike any other revolution that has happened in the history except the Indian freedom movement. So what would have happened if the regime determined to use force against the protesters? This is an extremely significant point to observe, especially when similar events are likely to occur in the other countries. And will the protests in the other countries be peaceful? At what point of time will both the regime and protesters cross the line and resign into violence? These questions should be considered before speculating the implications of these movements in other countries or regions.

Thirdly, the effectiveness of concessions and other freebies by the regime to accommodate the defendants. This has proved to be failed in both the cases but worth examining in other possible cases. In the Egyptian case President Mubarak was aware at the moment when his Tunisian counterpart was ousted that he will be the next in line. This prompted him to scrap the government, suspend the parliament and made him realize that he needs a Vice-President after thirty years of his rule. It shows that he was very much aware of the problem that the Tunisian president was ousted soon after the military switched its loyalty to people. Basically Mubarak tried to accommodate military by offering concessions such as appointment of a military background person as his vice-president so that he could preserve its loyalty. But it was too late and so little. Perhaps had he done this few months back, things would have been under his control. The other important question to be answered is what sort of accommodation that is going to come out between these rulers and their subjects? For instance, Jordan has sacked the government which is more or less traditional strategy. But will this work in Bahrain, where the regime is surviving simply through corruption. The answer is no because of its Shiite problems which are greater than economic threats.

Fourth, what will be the role of external players in these developments? During the protests Iran expressed its solidarity with the protesters and supported the revolution as did Palestine. It seems that Egyptian neighbouring countries' strategy towards the crisis could be 'fishing in troubled waters'. For instance, Iran has been supportive of regime change in Egypt despite its own poor record of governance, accountability and authoritarian rules. Therefore the external players will have some role to play but not a major one because of their short-term parochial interests. This applies to the US which simply does not know what to do. At one level the US is committed to democracy, freedom of expression and human rights but on the

other hand it is governed by two important calculations: national interest that prevents President Obama from interfering in internal affairs of Egypt but the US does not want a regime change from the outside which differentiates Obama's policy from Bush's strategy towards Iraq.

The final point is what kind of Egypt is going to emerge after the crisis? It is very nice to say that Mubarak is out but what next? It is entirely implausible to predict what kind of Egypt we are going to see. Will it be a smooth and orderly transition? Will there be some sort of accountability or will there be a military ruling behind the scenes. These questions are significant because what happens in Egypt will definitely have wider implications in the region. If Egypt transforms through smooth and orderly way then that will be a model for other countries. But if it descends into chaos then what should other countries do to prevent such an episode in the other countries. To conclude, it is for sure that post-Mubarak Middle East will not be the same.

Will this come into India's neighbourhood?

Prof. Ajay Darshan Behera

On the issue of what has happened in Egypt and Tunisia, a number of questions remain unanswered. It is widely being termed as a 'revolution' but is it actually so? Has there been a revolution or is it just a regime change? It is too early to call it a revolution; clarity would emerge only little later. The other interesting aspect of the movement is the little known background of the protesters. How much does the world know about these protesters? The general assumption about revolution is that it has to come through some sort of organizations or political parties. There should be a leader, in the movement, otherwise it will remain directionless. But none of these movements reflected the conventional mode of political protest. In Egypt, yes, the movement started with the call on facebook and many have called it as Twitter Revolution. There is no doubt that social media has played a role in mobilization. However, it is unlikely that the crowd pulled at Tahrir Square would manage to get anything more than a regime change. And hence it would remain just a protest. It also needs to be seen in the light of the fact that Mubarak did not have the support of military. If he had enjoyed the support, and if the regime would come hard on the protesters, things could have been different. And now that military is in charge of the affairs, it is difficult to accept whether it will give up power. Another important aspect is the class formation that is taking place. It needs to be understood as to who is making demands for political change. Since the background of protesters is not known, and the left ideology is weak in Egypt, all classes demanding change is a problematic question. In this case mobilization of Islamic ideology is getting quite stronger, which is similar to Pakistan where radical Islamic forces are getting stronger. The transition in Egypt is more likely to happen on Pakistani model, where military rules surreptitiously. Though Pakistani military is not involved in running the country, it runs the show from behind the scenes.

As far as implications for India's neighbours, especially for South Asia, are concerned there is a significant difference in the regime patterns of the countries. In South Asia most of the countries are democratic states as opposed to the case of Middle East. Whether the democracy in these countries is inclusive or not is an interesting subject for debate. For instance, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan the aspirations of people are reflected by some group or parties. Political parties in South Asia have penetration capabilities and voice of expression is there in these countries. South Asian countries too have seen repressive regimes. Emergency in India, Panchayati Raj in Nepal and military regime in Pakistan are some of the examples. It is also noteworthy that except for crackdown in North West and Balochistan, even the military regime of Pakistan did not pursue any repressive agenda. And to add to that democracy continued in Pakistan even when military was in power in Pakistan. Some of the movements in South Asia such as rise of Maoism and LTTE also reflected struggle for democracy. That is to say that more and more groups have been included in power struggle.

As far as spill over effects to India's neighbourhood are concerned, it is true a new class in Pakistan has been looking for a political change, however if any such change has to come it will come through Jihadist or religious fundamentalism. As new media played a significant role in the events in Egypt, in case of south Asia, it is unlikely to have such an impact. Until and unless a force is channelized by leader's movement, it will not translate into success.

Discussion

During the discussion participants raised many questions related to the ongoing developments in Egypt and prospects for similar revolution in the Middle East and its global economic ramifications. Some of the other important issues which also came under discussion are: the motive forces behind these events, impact on Iran, strategic implications for the entire Middle East especially in terms of Israel-Palestine relations as Netanyahu is already working on alternative options, the role of the US and its response to the upheaval. The Telegraph leaked a report that US played a key role in these uprisings, role of media particularly electronic media such as Al-Jazeera, social network and blogs and the role of military also needs consideration. The implications of the revolution on India and its neighbourhood were also discussed. It is emphasized that the instability in the region will definitely have economic implications for India, and hence it requires to re-craft its relations with many countries in the changing scenario. There is also a need to understand whether there are any Egypt's inside India, especially keeping in mind aspirations of people in 'troubled areas', since democracy as seen from New Delhi seems to be different from that in these troubled areas. However, it is this vibrant democratic culture with effective accountability that sustains the stability of the Indian polity and saves the nation from any crises. However, currently the image of the state is being undermined by the rise in corruption and scandals. While the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. In these conditions India is not immune to conditions that have led to revolutionary movements in Egypt and Tunisia.