

DEMOCRATIZATION AND POLITICAL TRANSITION IN ARAB WORLD: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Democracy and Democratization process was among the top priorities in the new post-cold war global agenda. This issue has convinced some undemocratic countries of Arab World to set up in quest for democracy and to assertively demand their long-denied socio-economic and political justice by the autocratic rulers for the region. Indeed, the current Arab spring is geared towards transition from undemocratic system (i.e. Monarchy and Military dictatorship) to democracy. Secondary data was adopted in this study. The study revealed that humiliation, prolong monarchy/military dictatorship, lack of economic reform, globalization and proliferation of mass literacy were among the factors responsible for political transition in the region. Meanwhile, establishment of tenets of democracy (i.e. rules of law, human rights, freedom, etc.) and insecurity, external domination and loss of lives were among the prospect and challenges of the transition. The paper recommended among others that there is need for political and economic reform in the Arab countries which would lead to transit to democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy and Democratization process was among the top priorities in the new Post-Cold War global agenda. In fact, some undemocratic countries were in the process to democratize their system towards emulating and transforming to western liberal democracy. Fukuyama (1992), pointed that “the end of cold war is the end of history and is the ideological evolution of mankind and universalization of western liberal democracy as a final form of western government”.

Though, the Fukuyama’s opinion was being challenged by different authorities but, it is just a political prognostication on the rise and consolidation of democratic system of government across the western world, as well as to the less developed countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Habbiso (2001:1) hinted that “recent decades have witnessed a dramatic, transforming political systems in Central and eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia as well as parts of Africa.

Meanwhile, the former American President, George W. Bush pointed out that “just 25 years ago, at the start of the 1980s, there were only 45 democracies on the face of the Earth. Today, Freedom house reports that there are 122 democracies, and more people now live in liberty than ever before (Bush, 2006a). During the 1970s and 1980s, a wave of democratization swept across the world, encompassing several dozen countries. This wave had impact on Muslim societies, but it was limited (Huntington, 1996:114).

Although the collapse of Soviet Union, which marked the end of Cold War in 1989, consolidated the argument of western and pro-western scholars to perceive that “Western Liberal Democracy” is the only system of good governance. This illusionary statement was circulated globally despite the crises attached to western democracy in so many countries across the globe. Indeed, the globalization of democracy culminated the Arab World (i.e. non-democracies) to enter into the nest and tunnel of democratization process.

Quite recently, the masses of North African and Middle Eastern States seemed to have set off in quest for democracy and to assertively demand their long denied socio-economic and political justice by the autocratic rulers of the region. After several decades of absolutist, monarchical rule (Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman) and military tyranny (Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt and Yemen), the long oppressed and brutalized Arab masses of North Africa and the Middle East have experienced a sort of rude awakening to rise up against their dictators demanding their human rights, basic political and civil liberties and fundamental freedoms (Habbiso, 2001:1).

Apparently, the seizing of perishable vegetable items of the youth salesman Mohammed Bouazizi by the law enforcement agency aggravated him with high emotion and led him to set himself ablaze in Tunisia, such episode, directly convince the citizens to demonstrate against the government of Ben Ali and subsequently became the bush fire to affect others (i.e. Egypt, Libya and more recently Yemen, Bahrain, Syria and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). The aim of this paper is to ascertain democratization and political transition in Arab World: prospects and consequences.

2. THE ORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is in agreement with the Marxist theory of social conflict from the perspective of his political economy approach. Karl Marx (1844) predicated in his treatise on social relations and class conflict. These theories presumed that conflict is the prime moving force in society and in history. He argued that society is in a constant conflict between groups and classes. Most of the conflict centered on ownership and control of the means of production. Conflict is a constant struggle for power and income involving classes, races, sexes and nationalities.

Indeed, the Arab spring characterized on masses militia revolt against their prolonged dictatorial government due to the high rate of injustice, absence of equity and lack of public accountability by those who are entrusted in government. Although, the hereditary tendency prevails the system of governance (i.e. circulation of elites within their family kingship) to the detriment of the populace. This formidable threat paved the way for masses to wage war against the existence of government in order to entrench democratic system with popular support by the entire citizens in order to ensure equal representation and to foster national development.

In this regard, the revolutionary forces were among the majority of the deprived and exploited masses, which was described by Marx as “proletariats” while the ruling elites were “Bourgeoisies”, who control the means of production to the detriment of the masses. This episode culminated the masses in the Arab countries (e.g. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria etc.) to counter against their ruling class in order to establish a system of government that would ensure justice, fairness, equity, transparency and public probity for the betterment of the entire citizens.

3. DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS ON THE GLOBAL ARENA

Today, the wind of democratization has blown to the entire global community, which has impact on the non-democratic regimes (i.e. monarchy, military rule, and personal dictatorship) to start thinking on transition from traditional system of governance to the contemporary democratic system. In fact, the “Arab Spring” of North Africa and Middle East was an ancillary to democratic movement in the region. In other words, the agitation and reactions of the citizens in North Africa and Middle Eastern States against their leaders was centrally based on political movement for change from despotic royal elites and military oligarchy to democratic system.

Huntington (1991:579) pointed out that “A wave of democratization is a group of transitions from non-democratic regimes that occurs within a specified period and that significantly outnumbers transitions in the opposite direction in the same period. The first wave began in America in the early nineteenth century and culminated at the end of World War I with about thirty countries having democratic regimes”.

He further argued that “the allied victory in World War II and decolonization started a second movement toward democracy which, however petered out by the early 1960s when about thirty six countries had democratic regimes. The third wave of democratization occurred: the ways in which political leaders and public in the 1970s and 1980s ended authoritarian systems and created democratic ones. The routes of changes were diverse, as were the people primarily responsible for bringing about change. “As I pointed earlier, Bush states that... today, freedom House reports that there are 122 democracies, and more people now live in liberty than ever before”. The above citations, paved the way for internationalization of democracy and globalization of democracy.

Although, the Arab uprising in North Africa and Middle East was characterized on popular participation in governance, respect of human rights, liberty, freedom and rules of law to the entire citizens in order to remove them out of deprivation and dictatorship. The pro-democracy movements or fighters are vehemently opposed to accept any offers short of revolutionary changes to the status-quo, and instead fighting to the death to establish political systems, institutions and governments based on the will of their respective nations (Habbiso, 2011:1-2).

Consequently, the “Arab Spring” was an avenue for challenging state power and total withdrawal of citizens legitimacy to their leaders which attributed to the removal of four leaders from their throne in North Africa (i.e. Ben Ali of Tunisia; Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Mu’ammar Gaddafi of Libya and Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen) and subsequently it would affect the others in the Middle East (e.g. Bashir Al-Assad of Syria; and Al-Khalifah of Bahrain), etc. The statement of United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon after the revolutionary rebels killed former Libyan leader Mu’amar Gaddafi was directly towards them. Moon emphatically stated “is the end of the beginning”.

In fact, such movement has made non-democracies (i.e. Monarchy) to establish some changes in their political institutions, which were never before. The appointment of prime minister recently by King Hussein of Jordan and recognition of women to exercise their franchise rights in local general election in Saudi Arabia were among the classical illustration. Indeed, these changes were the pre-requisite for democracy.

4. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR POLITICAL TRANSITION IN ARAB WORLD

Allegorically, the Arab countries was characterized on monarchy system of administration traced back from Islamic history since the inception of three important dynasties (i.e. Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid dynasties) after the demise of Caliphate system of Islamic government in the region. The royal Islamic monarchical system took over in the Arab World almost 1200 years ago. At the initial stage, the system was based on inheritance, state welfarism, accommodation of social justice, accountability and transparency as enshrined from Islamic injunctions. But later, the authoritarian oligarchy, royal and military dictatorship emerged gradually in their system due to the acceleration of western colonial imperialism in the region in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the colonial exploitation and domination in nineteenth century made them assimilated and vulnerable to the authoritarian tendencies of white men in their region. Indeed, the early educated elites (Nationalist) was brainwashed with colonial legacy, which accentuated them to combine suppression with economic opportunity to their citizens. Owens (1987:80) pointed out that “the history of certain authoritarian governments in twentieth century suggests that such governments can stay in power for a long period if they combine suppression with economic and social opportunity”.

From the above analysis so far, the factors held responsible for political transition movement in Middle East and North African (MENA) states were polarized into two folds: (a) primary factors (b) secondary factors. The secondary factors motivated the primary factors, which served as bedrock for massive popular protest against their regimes in the region. The factors are as follows:

a. Primary Factors

Nevertheless, the primary factors were already in place but, they required a course that stimulates them to emerge as pre-requisite for political transition in the Arab countries. The following were among the primary factors responsible for political transition movement in the Arab countries.

- i. **Prolong Monarchy and Military Dictatorship:** Most of the Arab countries are suffering with long-term monarchical system (i.e government of few royal elites) and draconian military rule which they are anti-thectical to contemporary system of democracy and good governance. These governments were controlled by few insignificant royal and military elites to the detrimental of the populace. In this regard, there was no popular participation, absence of rules of law, lack of freedom and liberty and general dehumanization to the citizens. This issue precipitates their governments to formulate public policy to suit the interest of parochial elites without considering to the demands of the masses majority. The 42 years of former Libyan leader Mu’ammr Gaddafi, 33 years of Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and 23 years of Ben Ali of Tunisia were among the classical illustration.
- ii. **Lack of Adequate Economic Reforms:** At this juncture, Michele Dune pointed out that “promises for reform have lost credibility throughout the region (i.e. Arab World) as the leaders have made such promises for decades without any result to show. The fact is that their economic reform is basically a political promise without translating it into physical reality. Indeed, Ben Ali’s economic reform is a typical example of political economic reform that does not yield any positive result to the Tunisian citizens.
- iii. **Negligence on Security Enforcement Agency:** In fact, most of the Arabian States in Middle East and North Africa failed to motivate their security apparatus with modern training facilities and enough financial incentives. Dune (2011) pointed out that “Egypt and Tunisia have abolished their security apparatuses, both countries need to more thoroughly reform their security services and the police”.

In this regard, the security lapses may easily convince the anti-government protest to seize political power from the present government. Indeed, most of military coups against civilian government in mid 60s and early 70s in Africa was centrally due to the security negligence by the authorities. This paved the way for military to use their draconian power to take over the mantle of leadership in their states.

- iv. **Globalization:** The accelerated globalization of recent decades has unfolded in tandem with notable growth of liberal democracy in many states where it was previously absent, such as in Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America. A so-called “third wave” of democratization in Late 1980s and early 1990s has gone hand in hand, with contemporary globalization (Huntington, 1991).

Several connections can be drawn between supraterritorial relations of globalization and the spread of liberal democracy to previously undemocratic states in the late 20th century. For example, global human rights campaigns and other trans boarder civic associations, global mass media, regional and trans world agencies have supplied various forms of democracy

support which pressed for an end to many authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, military dictatorship, etc. all over the world (Kukoc, 2006:376). Though, the protest demonstration of Tunisian citizens over the humiliation of Bouazizi has circulated across the globe through satellite media at the instance of demonstration. This tragedy motivates others in Egypt and Libya towards protesting against their undemocratic regimes.

- v. **Proliferation of Mass Literacy and Urbanization:** From 20th and early 21th century there was a massive literacy and urbanization in Arab World that aid the development of their political culture. The operation of American universities in Egypt, Syria and other parts of Arab countries and studies of Arab international students in the west have contributed towards inculcating some aspects of western culture and awareness campaign. Zik (1962) posited that “education can make people easily to govern but impossible to enslave”.

These shifts in literacy, education and urbanization created socially mobilized populations with enhanced capabilities and higher expectations who could be activated for political purposes in ways in which illiterate peasants could not. Socially mobilized societies are more powerful societies (Huntington, 1996:86).

- vi. **Religion and Cultural Movement:** The predominant population in Arab countries is Muslim with Islamic cultural background, which supposed their leaders to govern them in accordance with the Islamic injunctions but the reverse is the case. Though the pro Islamism and Pan Arabism (i.e. Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas of Palestine, Islamic revivalist in Syria and other Arabs countries) were agitating for transforming their regimes towards Islamic government. Islamic state accept the ‘Shurah’ system as forum for legislative assembly, rules of law and separations of powers etc. as the basis for democracy as well as Islam against violation of human rights, corruption and dictatorship.

From the above foregoing analysis so far, Huntington (1996) argued that “specific religious or cultural traditions are good or bad for democracy”. The Pro-Sharia religious civil society organization in the region takes this movement as an avenue towards political transition to Islamic democracy. In fact, immediately two days after rebels killed former Libyan leader Mu’ammarr Gaddafi, the National Transition Council (NTC) headed by Mustapha Abdul Jalil announced that Sharia is a guiding principle of their interim and future government of Libyans. Meanwhile, when democratic election took place in Egypt immediately after the removal of Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim brotherhood or Ikhwanul Muslim party has won the election with popular support. This paved the way for Muhammad Mursi to become an elected president for shortest period of time before his removal and detention by his chief of Army Staff General Abdul Fatah Asisi. Indeed, General Asisi converted to become a Civilian president in Egypt in 2013 but still the Muslim brotherhood were always agitating for restoring their candidate into power and denouncing Assisi’s government as illegitimate rule in Egypt.

- vii. **Liberation and Elections:** The removal of Tunisian leader dated December, 2010 and the assassination of Libyan leader dated 20th October, 2011 at his home town Sirte, three days after (i.e. 23rd October, 2011) was marked as the liberation day to Libyan and Election Day to Tunisian counterpart. Clearly, the liberation and elections were among the requirements for democratization process in the Arab countries. Later two election was duly conducted in Egypt after the removal of Mubarak (i.e. the election of Muhammad Mursi and General Asisi) which never happened before. In fact, this is another development for democracy.

b. Secondary Factor

The self-immolation of young and jobless Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi in provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, being deprived of his vegetable stand and humiliated by the authorities, triggered popular movements and historic events in the Arab world completely unexpected in their magnitude ... (Zubaidi, 2011:7). In fact, the deprivation of Bouazizi by the authorities in Tunisia aggravated his emotion to obsessional melancholy where he ablaze himself along the street. This episode motivated the masses to demonstrate against the Tunisian government which led to the ousted of President Zennel Abedeen ben Ali from the throne of leadership after he spent 23 years in power.

The uncalculative attempt became the genesis for popular protest in Middle East and North African states. Due to the fact that, the success of Tunisian Citizens motivate the Egyptians for removal of Hosni Mubarak and Libyans against Mu'amar Gaddafi. Indeed, their success for removing them out of power has currently gingered the neighboring countries of Middle East to protest against their governments (i.e. Bahrain and Yemen) while Syria is in serious bondage and civil war between rebels who want to topple the Assad's government since 2011 up to date.

Democratization can be understood as a process sub-divided into three phases (i) the liberalization phase, when the previous authoritarian regime opens up or crumbles; (ii) a transition phase, often culminating when the first competitive elections are held; and (iii) the consolidation phase, when democratic practices are expected to become more firmly established and accepted by most relevant actors (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Linz and Stephan, 1996). Three countries of North African States (i.e. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen) had attained the first phase, meanwhile, Bahrain and Syria of the Middle East were on process. Though the former were about to enter into second phase which Tunisia have already started (i.e. General Assembly Election).

Finally, as pointed by Stephan and Robertson (2003) that "the third wave (democratization) transition also defied cultural arguments positing that democracy is incompatible with certain faiths and religious values. The only region seems to remain relatively outside this wave of democratization is the Arab World". Contrary to the above argument, the current political transition in Arab world of Middle East and North African states was literally described as the "fourth wave of democratization".

5. PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL TRANSITION TO THE ARAB COUNTRIES

5.1 The prospects of political transition to the Arab World encompass the following:

- i. **Democracy and Popular Participation:** Democracy refers to the majority rule, minority rights, adherence to the rules of law, separations of powers and constitutionalism (Tar, 1999). The essence of democratic entrenchment in the country is to allow those who are out of power or was being deprived to participate in the act of governance through electing their leaders. Indeed, the political transition in Arab countries has brought democratic changes (i.e emergence of new political parties, electoral competition, political campaign, election time table, etc.). In orderto shift from the old order of royal monarchy and military/personal dictatorship to democratic system. A general assembly election conducted in Tunisia, Libyan interim government election as well as the proposed election in Egypt were among the typical examples. Some scholars take this current transition as fourth wave of democratization.

- ii. **Rules of Law and Constitutionalism:** Democratic system would enable the leaders to govern their citizens in accordance to the existing rules and regulations as enshrined in the constitution instead of military decree of traditional monarch laws. In democracy, the people would elect their legislatures for making viable law to them, as well as due process is in place before making any law. In fact, this current transition is a gesture for Arab people to have their own legislature and to govern themselves in conformity with their constitution.
- iii. **Liberty and Freedom:** Some scholars contend that the genesis of recent Arab unrest against their leaders was due to lack of freedom and liberty. The draconian measures of Arab leaders have distorted and blockade the freedom of speech press and associations which make the citizens vulnerable to their decision without offering any latitude to express their problem before the government. The recent transition led to the maximum freedom of speech whereby some citizens voice out their position in the international media in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen. Meanwhile, some citizens have formed their associations and political parties in order to defend their collective interest.
- iv. **Human Right / Minority Rights:** There was a gross violation of human rights in most of the Arab countries, thousands of people were detained when they went against their government before, but, nowadays the citizens have a privilege to exercise their rights due to the political transition in the region. The demonstration of minority Christians recently in Egypt aftermath of Mubarak government was in line towards expressing their rights for political participation before the military interim government.
- v. **Rise and Consolidation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** As I said earlier, there was no freedom of association in most of the Arab countries, which block their chance to establish a recognized civil society organization. Though, there was a proliferation of civil society organizations in Egypt and Tunisia (i.e. Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and An-Nahda Party at Tunisia) and more would come in various countries of Arabs.
- vi. **Unity and in Diversity:** The current unrest in Arab World served as an avenue for harmonizing the discord among Arabs. This is due to the fact that they have a unique mission for changing the political system of their nation. The Muslim majority and Christian minority joined together at Tahrir Square in Egypt in order to remove the Mubarak government. Meanwhile, different clans of Libya have united towards challenging Gaddafi's military oligarchy.

5.2 Meanwhile, the Challenges of this Political Trend in Arab Region were among the following:

- i. **Insecurity:** Since the intervention of NATO and other allied forces in Iraq that lead to the demise of Saddam's administration, there was no adequate security in Iraq. The same episode affects the security of Afghan government aftermath of Taliban government. Indeed, if care is not taken it would affect other Arab countries in the recent unrest (i.e. Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen). In fact, the supporters of past government would develop their envy toward threatening security condition in the country.
- ii. **Intra Clan Clashes and Disharmony:** Some Arab clans belong to the immediate past leaders, which they can react against the mission and aspiration of the new government. This would intimidate peace and harmony to the new government. Though, there is a tendency for Pro-Gadhafi's, Pro-Mubarak or Pro-Ben Ali to attack the new governments. This would lead to intra-clan clashes between the clan of past leader and the existing one. In the same vein, the pro-democratic movements have confused the international community towards establishing peace and stability in the Middle East. Former Britain Prime Minister Tony

Blair points out that “Arab Pro-democracy uprising may spell more regional instability that could complicate Middle East Peace effort”.

- iii. **External Domination / Economic Exploitation:** The emergence of NATO and other allied forces into some Arab countries for the purpose of changing old government with democracies was a western mission for democratization agenda. In this regard, it may lead its agencies and allied forces to establish their military base for economic exploitation by looting their oil and other natural resources in the name of democracy and good governance.

Some analysts pointed that the western mission for spreading democracy is in conformity with their foreign policy towards achieving their permanent interest not really for the development of the region. The slogan for reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan were among the classical illustration.

- iv. **De-Population:** The provocative and draconian measures against the pro-democratic movements by the past three governments of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya as well as the ongoing unrest between the government security forces with their opposition in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen have claimed almost 350,000 lives and devastated worth than hundred million dollars property. Statistics showed that almost 270,000-300,000 lost their lives in Libyan revolution (www.presstv.ir.com). Meanwhile, over 250,000 lost their lives in Syria since the beginning of this revolutionary force against Assad’s government. The victims were innocent civilians including youth, women, children and military personnel who have the future prospect to the nation building. This tragedy has a great impact on demographic youth and women population in the Arab World.
- v. **Fear of Future attack by the Loyalist / Cabinet of former Regime Leaders:** There is a suspicious atmosphere for fear of attack at any moment by the loyalist/cabinet of former regime leaders if they regain their strength as they would easily destroy the new government, which they would take such as revenge strategy to their past mentor. This issue would easily happen as in the case of Iraq unless necessary provocative measures are taken by the nascent democracies.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the paper concluded that the primary factors (i.e. prolong monarchy and military dictatorship, lack of economic reform, negligence on security system, globalization, and proliferation of mass literacy/urbanization, etc.) were among the cause for secondary factor (i.e. Bouazizi’s humiliation by authorities) that reveals towards pro-democratic movement in the Arab countries which translate into political transition in three countries (i.e. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya) and subsequently the changes would affect the Middle East countries of Bahrain, Syria and Yemen due to the ongoing political tensions in their states.

Indeed, this tension exacerbated the crises and consolidates some terrorist organizations in the region to challenge the sovereign political system of the state as well as to motivate others to withdraw their limited legitimacy from the state. This conundrum precipitates what Zartman (1995) described as “failed state or state collapsed”. Because, the revolutionary forces would either took over the power or defeat by the government forces to live in serious formidable threat on security and stability to the entire citizens.

6.1 Based on the above Analysis so far, the Paper recommends the following:

- i. There is a need for political economic reform in Middle East and North African States. This would enable them to establish democratic governance and welfare economic system to shun away from prolong royal monarchy and personal military dictatorship.
- ii. Mandatory registration into regional organization of Arab league to the Arab countries would aid the organization to confront and address any political and socio-economic downturn of its state member within such organization by taken provocative measure before it spread to another state.
- iii. The Arab leaders should utilize their natural endowment for their National development as manifested by Islamic Republic of Iran in the region and to eschew from corruption, nepotism and royal family enrichment.
- iv. The Arab leaders should govern their citizens in conformity with their constitutional jurisdiction not for the sake of their self-aggrandizement. This would enable them to entrench good governance, fairness and public accountability.
- v. The Arab league should allow the existence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in order to assist their leaders in the act of governance.
- vi. The western powers and their international alliances (e.g. NATO) should not intervene into any political problem of Arab countries unless with referendum or request from their regional organization.
- vii. Proscription of all ethnic militia and mercenaries and keeping constant surveillance to prevent regrouping or the emergence should be made. In this regard the governments of Arab countries should ban possession of illegal fire arm and sophisticated weapons by the militants in order to avoid political violence and to ensure sanity and stability of their regime.
- viii. The government of Arab countries and the Middle East should improve the service of their security and law enforcement agencies in-terms of training, motivation and provision of modern equipment in order to enhance them to discharge their duties diligently and judiciously.
- ix. Youth empowerment through creation of jobs opportunities and poverty alleviation measures should put in place to the youth population in the region to avoid any resistance by the frustrated unemployed youth against the government.

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