

Is a new “Arab Spring” possible?

After a young man named Muhammad Buazizi set himself on fire on December 17th 2010, a major social movement started in both local and world politics. Shortly after gaining their independence, small authorities in Northern Africa and the Middle East started to fall due to ideological dilemmas and poverty. This event resulted in the expression of basic human demands such as equality, freedom, justice, and equal economic distribution to regimes that hold their people under strict control for many years with various daily ideologic maneuvers.

However, in a short amount of time, the righteous expressions of the society started to face oppression and criminalization thanks to the help of local and international actors. On one hand maneuvers of the USA, Russia, China and the EU, and on the other hand the criminalization of the process by some local countries namely Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE using terrorist groups, their support for coups, their century old-age attempts at preserving the present status quo; all of these efforts caused the local communities to go through major catastrophic events. It would be no surprise then, to see the emergence of movements that questioned the qualifications of oppressive groups and regimes in the Arab world where there is no political elites.

On the present day, the attempts of taking all these structures under the umbrella of the regime seem to have taken control of politic, sociologic, and religious movements by limiting them to a certain extent. It seems that the local communities are still quite far from the free and lawful order that they demanded since the last month of 2010. Likewise, the regimes in Syria and Egypt, despite all efforts of their people, are still present with the help of foreign countries. The civil wars in Libya and Yemen, also with the help and intervention of foreign countries, are causing major destructions.

Events that Triggered the Arab Spring and the Perspective of the Future

Despite all preventions, the post-Arab Spring effects are still to be seen in the region. The examples that are evident of the vibrant willpower of the people seem to be increasing day by day. For example, following the latest executions in Egypt, Egyptian youth created the “Tahrir Again” slogan online where it became a current issue in the country. At the end of the fifth year since the military coup; while inflation and unemployment are rising at a major rate, Egyptian currency continues to lose value. Along with all these economic problems, social inequality among others is resulting in the expansion of people’s repercussions in sub-groups against the regime. Additionally, events such as traffic accidents, fires and similar negativities due to poor quality of infrastructure seem to have diminished the patience of the people against order even further.

Besides, it is feared that the communal movements that started in France called “rebellion against inequality” might spread to many Arab countries including Egypt. The Egyptian media was quick to report of the “yellow vest” sales limitation as well as the increasing precautions against possible protests by labor unions. However, how much longer can the Egyptian regime, which is neither overpassing nor addressing the rights of the people, and instead are responding the demands with terror, ignore the will of its people?

This situation does not only happen in Egypt. We can see similar restlessness in the Gulf countries too. People react negatively to the Gulf countries’ reestablishment of their embassies in Damascus as a way of giving legitimacy to the Assad regime.

When we look at Jordan in this scope for example, where some protests have been organized, it is clear that the events have violent tendencies from time to time; yet the government hasn’t come up with the right policies or regulations to preserve stability of the country. It is possible to witness a similar situation in Sudan. The protests that criticize the regime became even more intense despite the country’s martial law enforcement. Sudan’s media broadcast are skimmed or manipulated by the government. And while the protests are going on, Omar al-Bashir formed a cabinet, which mostly made of the army. It is a too optimistic statement to say that only time will tell how this move will soothe the restlessness of the people.

The situation is no different in the North Africa, either. Abdulaziz Bouteflika's participation in the upcoming presidential elections that is going to be his fifth, after ruling Algeria for 20 years, is causing protests. The news show that the protests are getting even more intense. It is being reported that Bouteflika who is old and has major health problems went to Sweden and France many times for treatment. A group that consists of some generals and consultants supports Bouteflika who rejects to share the administration and transferring it to the people despite the aforementioned situation.

Palestine, being one of the most important crises points in the region, shows that no solution for the century-old problem can be seen in sight. Trump's New Middle East Plan pleases neither the Palestinians nor the people who live in the region. Even though the "Deal of the Century", which has become a byword lately, contains articles that offer Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli peace in the model of French-German peace; the application of the plan is obviously hard to achieve.

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At this point, the question of how and how much the Arab Spring transformed the region and its people becomes a major point of interest. It should be questioned how this process shaped the ruling class, cultural elites, military-bureaucratic mechanism, religious groups, and people in the Middle East as well as the Arab communities. The question of the efficiency of the processes-which resemble the Arab Spring-in the future also should be thought about.

To sum up, the main question that deserve an answer at this point is: "Is it possible for the emergence of a new wave of a communal movement to reflect people's will to revitalize today's Middle East, despite the current situation caused by the painful and controversial Arab Spring?"

The Haunting Phenomena of the Arab Spring

Analyzing the triggers of the Arab Spring, we can see that the process is based upon simple yet fundamental humanitarian notions like a respectful and honorable life, freedom, justice and equality. Even though the economic injustice was seen to be the triggering motivation in the process, it can be understood that the demands are far beyond it. However, the people are still far from meeting their demands at this point after eight years of the process.

To make matters worse, the size of the sources that were allocated for wars by the Arab ruling class forced the people to live under even worse conditions. Budget for security in crisis zones, such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen failed both the living conditions and purchase power of the people substantially.

While the Arab insurgencies affect the geopolitics of the Middle East profoundly; the weaponry agreement, worth 120-300 billion dollars between the USA and Saudi Arabia at such a time received some serious criticism. The derogatory and dishonoring approach that was used during the meeting between Donald Trump and Muhammad bin Salman in the White House tarnished the Arab World's honor, particularly the Gulf countries.

In the region where violation of human rights and unlawfulness are ongoing at a fast pace; thinkers, activists and religious scholars who express their ideas independently are arrested and imprisoned unlawfully, unfairly and without any kind of explanation. Besides; homicides, assassinations, military interventions, and the competition of arming increase the restlessness of people even more.

In other respects; even though the facts that most Arab countries openly expressed that they have the intention of having close relations with Israel, that they are relying on Israel for national security, that they expect salvation from the West and all statements that lead to the alliance with the West and Israel are being treated as necessary steps taken with a pragmatist manner and are being legitimated by the authorities; it is not possible that a group of people who will eventually questions these relations may emerge and the process which triggered the Arab Spring may develop again.

This is because the foreign factor that triggered the Arab Spring is closely related to Arab countries' foreign policies. The one century-long occupation in Palestine and its relations with Israel are one of the main subjects that trigger social opposition in the Arab communities. The USA's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the nation-state law enacted by the Netanyahu administration, declaration of Israel as a "Jewish State", Israel's ongoing destruction of Palestinian residences (including those on the Gaza Strip), the ongoing blockade on Palestinians, the silence of Arab leaders on these issues serve as important factors that may cause a "silent rage" in the Arab world. Arab politicians must realize that the Palestinian issue determines the region's longstanding stability because the Palestinian conflict is one of the most important challenges of the Arab world.

All in all, the relations of Arab politicians with Israel are one of the basic reasons why legitimacy of these regimes experience erosion in the eyes of their people.

Foreign military presence in the Middle East, the Iraqi occupation and the military interventions are main events that put the region under the microscope by the Arab people. Being one of the factors that inspired the Arab Spring, the issue of foreign military presence in the region only increased even more. Russia's and Iran's presence in Syria, USA, Russia and China troops in Libya, the return of the UK to the region with military bases, expansion of Chinese military and similar developments are escalating the distrust of people and their scrutiny against the elite.

The political and cultural elite in Arab countries who resist understanding the motivations of the Arab Spring, seem to be insensitive about the demands and expectations of the people. Arab leaders' ideological distance from the citizens and their manners as delegates of the West-and sometimes the socialist ideology-are major problems for the people. Besides from their ideological incompatibility in relation to people's expectations; the fact that they have an intense socialist understanding as an ideological foundation is resulting in a large gap between themselves and their citizens in both their political manners and characteristics. Moreover, the fact that the political and cultural elite are administrators with dual passport and that they graduated from foreign schools are among the factors that supports the mentioned argument.

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These psychological and mental motives that brought out the Arab Spring have been deepened in the last eight years. The fact that contemplation which is the basic qualification of being a human is oppressed and is seen as humiliating in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, and for the most part of the region, is a psychological factor that is affective during the questioning process of present political systems. To sum up, the fact that all ideological and physical motivations that resulted in the Arab Spring are still alive and dynamic; also, the fact that derogatory policies that harm people's self-respect, honor and character that are now being used with violence more than ever, are the main reasons which encourage the locals to rebel.

All in all, political, sociological and psychological conditions caused by the Arab Spring are still present in the Middle East. An honorable and respectable lifestyle, freedom, fair economic distribution, and social equality that Middle Easterners are in the search of, cannot be seen in sight. No new changes have been made in the formation of political processes which can help people determine their fates. Therefore, as long as people's disappointments continue; processes that resemble the Arab Spring will always be present. Because, the search of something other than the current status quo, which has its colonial logic, is a part of human nature. Therefore, it is easy to say that events such as the Arab Spring will happen in the future under different names.

Lessons and Risks

In the last eight years, aforementioned social and political rebellions contain many experiences from which important lessons about the local people and local groups should be learned. The Arab Spring left behind a major humanitarian, political and social destruction; transformation of rebellions into civil war, inadequacy of life security and property, division of societies into sub-groups, ineffectiveness of local

people in the change of the world order while it is being reshaped; and they are going to be the root of problems which will affect the fate of the region.

One important lesson learned is that there are still no competent mechanisms that can manage this social potential at the macro level. Because of the insufficient social preparation; the process is inevitably face major difficulties. But despite everything, it should be noted that this demand of change is unstoppable.

In conclusion it can be said that the cause of the Arab Spring, such as freedom, justice, equality, political participation; the inability of solving the Palestinian issue, current progresses of Israeli-Arab relations and Arab-West relations, especially in the issue of Jerusalem and Arab countries' foreign policies are responsible in the rise of serious anger within the Middle Eastern societies.