

## **Study Group on Political Turbulence in the Middle East**

### **Goals and Activities**

In January 2011, the large-scale demonstrations against President Ben Ali's regime, dubbed the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia, spread throughout the Arab world and ultimately led to President Mubarak of Egypt stepping down in February. Confrontations between the government and demonstrators continue in Jordan, Yemen, and Syria, and even in the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and other countries on which Japan relies for much of its energy supply, citizens' calls for reform are causing the regimes serious concern. The efforts of democratic movements to reform authoritarian dictatorships that have held power for a long time while working affirmatively for democratization undermine the stability of states that have held on to power by suppressing with an iron-fisted rule all opposition existing within these states, but many people worry that this will bring a new element of instability to the Middle East. Both assessments are tentative. At the moment, it is all one can do just to keep up with the rapid developments in these countries, so our grasp of the intricacies, must less the overall picture, is inadequate. Also unclear are the impact that this "Arab Spring" will have on peace between Palestine and Israel, the greatest concern in the Middle East, and the response of the US, which wields tremendous influence in this region.

This study group, consisting of researchers considered experts on the Middle East, will seek cooperation from Middle Eastern media researchers as well as experts on the US' Middle Eastern policy in order to conduct diverse and comprehensive research on the causes for the regime changes occurring in the region, and the possible effects of these developments. It will examine the autocratic regimes throughout the Middle East and issues of regional stability, which have a large effect indeed on the safety and economic stability of Japan and the world through their supply of energy, and will look to make an effective contribution to determining how Japan should approach the region in its foreign relations.

### **Overview of Activities**

This study group will try to get a better understanding of the trends and backgrounds of the current political upheavals in the Arab countries. At the same time, through thorough consideration of Iran and the US, Internet media, satellite broadcasting companies, Islamist movements, and various other actors operating both inside and

outside borders that mutually influence developments in these countries, the group will not study political changes in individual Arab countries but rather will try to understand the Middle East as a whole and position it within the restructuring of the international order. The group will examine six specific topics of research:

1. The role of the media in political movements
2. The relationship between the army and the state/people in Arab states
3. Trends in Islamic movements
4. Trends and background factors in the political changes in the Arab states, in particular Egypt, Syria, the Gulf States, Yemen and Palestine
5. Interaction with Middle East peace
6. The responses of the US and Iran

The first meeting was held on May 11, 2011, to allow members to share their perspectives on the issues to be addressed. From here on, the group will meet periodically and present a final report by March 2012.

### **Study Group Members**

#### **Chairman**

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#### **Members**

IKEDA Akifumi	Professor, Toyo Eiwa University
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