

Report Summary

This report examines the present status and background of the Arab Spring and speculates on its future by analyzing the process that the political changes in Arab countries ongoing since 2011 – the “Arab Spring” grassroots movement seeking to topple authoritarian dictatorships – have undergone in the more than two years since the start of the Arab Spring, and by studying the problems that the Arab Spring poses for the Middle East as a whole and the international community.

Specifically, this report traces developments in Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Oman that have actually experienced political change through popular movements and analyzes trends in the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Although the GCC countries have not heretofore undergone large-scale political change, they do face various elements of instability domestically and at the same time have become deeply involved in the political changes in the aforementioned countries. The reactions of Turkey, a non-Arab country in the Middle East stepping up its involvement in the region and connected in numerous ways with the Arab Spring, are also addressed. In addition to this perspective from within the Middle East, the report discusses Indonesia from the perspective of comparative politics. Like the Middle Eastern and Arab countries, Indonesia is a majority Muslim country, and it has the experience of having transitioned from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system through a popular movement in the 1990s. Together with analyzing these countries on an individual basis, the report discusses the impact of the Arab Spring on the international relations of the entire Middle East and the “responsibility to protect” as an issue facing the international community. The following is an overview of the arguments presented on the topics analyzed and discussed.

First, the preface takes an overview of trends in the major Arab states since 2011. This overview places importance on those countries that served as stages for the Arab Spring but are not addressed by this report in specific chapters, i.e., Tunisia and Libya. Mention is also made of Jordan and Morocco, which, like the GCC countries, are under monarchical

systems but which face more difficult problems economically because they are non-petroleum-producing states. Jordan is in a particularly difficult situation due to its connections to the Syrian crisis and the Palestinian issue.

This overview of the two years of the Arab Spring sheds light on three problems: (1) the rise of Islamist forces, (2) changes in relations among the various actors in the Middle East, and (3) the gap between the high expectations of people seeking better lives and the economic stagnation they face. The first of these, the rise of Islamist forces, is symbolized by the fact that Islamist political parties affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood became ruling parties through elections in Tunisia and Egypt following the collapse of the authoritarian regimes in those countries. It remains unclear, however, whether these Islamist political parties will be able to establish stable democratic regimes. This is both because of the strong backlash from secularists against administrations run by Islamist parties, and the growing difficulty of restraining extremist forces within the Islamist movements that have pushed the dissolution of nation-states and armed conflict to the forefront of their agenda. With regard to (2), the relations among actors in the Middle East, one can point to the changes brought about by the maneuvering among the GCC countries, Egypt, Turkey and Iran over the Syrian crisis as well as the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated administration in Egypt on peace between Palestine and Israel and on the Iranian nuclear issue. In connection with (3), the gap between popular expectations and the slumping economy, Tunisia and Egypt were able to enter into a transition toward democracy after their authoritarian regimes were toppled, giving many citizens hopes of a positive turnaround in the economy, but the economy has still not in fact shown any prospects of recovering from the chaos of the revolution. Whether stable democratic political systems will take hold in Arab countries will be determined in great part by the degree to which the new administrations in Tunisia and Egypt are able to meet the high expectations of their citizens

Based on an awareness of the issues as described in the preface, the following analyses and observations are made in individual chapters. Chapter 1 argues that political disorder continued in Egypt after the collapse of the Mubarak regime, and that Egyptian society is

now becoming polarized between the supporters of Islamist forces and the supporters of liberal forces (youth movements, left-wingers, liberals). The Nasser-led Free Officer Corps that grabbed power in the 1952 coup d'état (the July Revolution) made a super-constitutional "constitutional declaration" to suspend the monarchical constitution. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that forced President Mubarak to resign in response to rising popular demonstrations in 2011 also suspended the constitution through such a "constitutional declaration" in seizing real power. SCAF and the new president Morsi have since promulgated this constitutional declaration in key situations, seeking to use this constitutional declaration, which has no legal grounding, as a weapon in their power struggle to eliminate the liberal forces behind the popular movement from the political process, expand the influence of the Islamist forces and preserve the influence of the military. This is noted as a reason that Egyptian society has become polarized between the supporters of Islamist forces and those of liberal forces.

Chapter 2 addresses the situation in Syria, where the chaos and violent retaliations have picked up in intensity, and analyzes the change in character of the anti-government factions in the course of Syria's "civil war" in 2012 and the growing presence of Sunni Islamist forces within these anti-regime factions on the basis of interview surveys conducted with Syrian anti-regime activists based in Turkey. In addition to considering Syria's present circumstances, the chapter discusses Islamism as an important political and social variable throughout the Arab Spring. These analyses and observations draw a picture of democratic ideals being pushed into the background and complex sectarian and ethnic factors that unify and divide Syrians coming to the forefront due to the increasingly local nature of the anti-regime movement, even as the Syrian opposition is finding it difficult to achieve ideological or organizational unity and the focus shifts from popular demonstrations to armed struggle. With regard to Sunni Islamism, people of varying ideologies and beliefs have been brought together under the Arab Spring by moderate Islamism, tolerant of the present nation-state system and appealing to the religious sentiments of the majority Sunni Muslims, solely for the purpose of overthrowing the dictatorial regime despite having no clear-cut vision or strong leader; this support is likely to expand for the time being. The

chapter points out at the same time that, even as fierce fighting with the regime continues to rage in Syria, the brave fight put up by armed Islamist extremist forces calling for the dissolution of the nation-state system has also gained them popularity among the people.

Chapter 3 deals with the GCC countries. The impact of the Arab Spring has not been uniform across the GCC countries. Oman saw the rise of a large-scale movement against the regime that led to the resignation of 12 cabinet ministers. Bahrain was compelled to call on Saudi troops from the peninsula to quell the demonstrations. Although Saudi Arabia did face a crisis with its own demonstrations, it managed to avert the crisis for the time being by employing extensive economic measures and enacting partial political and religious reforms. In Kuwait, where political debate has long been fierce, it is difficult to discern the extent to which the Arab Spring has had any impact. Almost no demonstrations or protests have taken place in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. These differences appear to be attributable to a certain degree to the importance of the government's allocation of petroleum revenues to the populace and to the difference in the public's overall wealth as a result. On the other hand, their involvement in other Arab states experiencing the Arab Spring appears to have a certain direction – maintaining stability in the GCC region, ensuring the legitimacy of monarchies, and supporting Sunni factions – but Saudi Arabia and Qatar can be seen working to take hold of economic interests in the Arab countries that have undergone a regime change. Although concerned about Islamists gaining power via the Arab Spring, the GCC countries appear to regard the Arab Spring as a business opportunity.

Chapter 4 takes a brief look at Oman, subjected to the greatest political change among the GCC countries, and Yemen, located south of the GCC countries and facing a variety of national unity issues. Following that, comparisons are drawn between Oman and the other GCC countries and between Yemen and Tunisia, Egypt and Libya to deepen the discussion on the political changes in both countries and to point to issues relating to the Arab Spring as a whole. In Yemen, demonstrations demanding the resignation of President Saleh broke out in the capital of Sana'a, drawing in tribal factions and developing into a clash with Saleh

supporters. At the same time, fighting broke out in the south of the country between Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Saleh government. Prompted by these circumstances, the US, concerned about AQAP's growing power, and Saudi Arabia, fearing an influx of refugees, presented a GCC mediation proposal aimed at a "halfway" conclusion whereby Saleh would be guaranteed immunity from prosecution and Vice President Hadi would assume the position of party leader. Behind this course of events seen as "halfway" compared to Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya were Yemen's location as a neighbor of Saudi Arabia and the fact that Islamist forces had no presence in Yemen until the 1990s. Yemen's Islamists had been an "international faction" that moved into the country over the past twenty years or so seeking direct confrontation with the US. Gaining a foothold in Yemen via the Arab Spring, they began calling for Yemen to be transformed into an Islamic state. This "localization" of Islamists could in future occur in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya where Islamists have gained strength via the Arab Spring.

In Oman, demonstrations criticized corruption and demanded improved living standards, and the government dealt with these through "handouts" of economic benefits to citizens. These "handouts" were a common feature across the GCC countries but, in Oman's case, key politicians close to the sultan retired and legislative powers were granted to the Shura Council. The retirement of key politicians was regarded as a personnel shuffle by the sultan. The granting of legislative authority to the Shura Council was a radical departure from standard practice in the GCC countries, where authority is concentrated in sultans and emirs. This was not so much a transfer of the sultan's authority as a practical decision in a situation requiring the establishment of new laws that could not be resolved simply through the executive branch's legislative capabilities. The GCC countries all face similar problems and, with Oman as a precedent, there is the possibility of democratization making progress in the form of legislative authority being dispersed out of practical considerations.

Chapters 1 through 4 discuss the Arab Spring as seen from within the Arab world, but Chapters 5 and 6 look at the Arab Spring from the perspectives of two non-Arab countries. Chapter 5 takes up Turkey, which has been involved in various ways with the Arab Spring,

broadly examines Turkey's responses to events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, and considers the effectiveness of the "Turkish model" for democratization in the Arab countries as well as the impact of the Arab Spring on the foreign policy of the Justice and Development Party (JDP). While Turkey's response to the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya was limited, it has become deeply involved in neighboring Syria, and this chapter analyzes the process by which Turkey switched from mediating negotiations between the Assad regime and opposition factions to actively assisting the opposition. As for the efficacy of the Turkish model, Turkey's JDP differs greatly from the Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt in firmly adhering to secularism as a national policy despite being a pro-Islam party and, given the differences in economic and political environments as well, it would appear at first glance that the model would not be of direct effectiveness. Nevertheless, it could provide suggestions for organizing popular political parties, re-reading religious norms from the viewpoint of conservative values, and balancing welfare policies with liberal-friendly economic policies. The JDP's foreign policy has emphasized human rights, a good-neighbor policy, and contributions to regional stability. However, the Arab Spring brought to the forefront the ethical problems associated with maintaining amicable relations with authoritarian regimes, and Turkey's active assistance to Syrian opposition forces have done nothing to stabilize the region, the result being that Turkey is unable to pursue specific policies to bring about regional stability. To defuse this situation, it is important that Turkey continue talks with countries/actors such as Israel, Iran and Iraq's central government with which relations have soured as a result of Turkey's foreign policy choices.

Chapter 6 moves away from the Middle East to analyze Indonesia's experience with democratization as well as the present status of Islam and politics. By drawing comparisons with the process of political change in Egypt as well as comparisons between Islamist/pro-Islamist parties in the Middle East, particularly Turkey's JDP, and Indonesia's Islamist parties, a perspective is provided for looking back at the present situation in the Middle East and the Arab world. An analysis of points of contention over "Muslim-ness" sheds light on the relationship between Islam and politics in modern Indonesia, and provides food for deeper thought on Islamism. It is noted here that, despite similarities

between Indonesia and Egypt in the concentration of power and wealth in the president's family under an authoritarian regime and in economic conditions in the country, the resemblance ends when it comes to relationships between the president, the ruling party and the military. The democratic regime in Indonesia is essentially the same oligarchy in place since colonial times concealed behind a façade of democracy, and is not supported by an organization such as Turkey's JDP that has succeeded as a popular political party by embracing the new bourgeoisie, or the internally cohesive Muslim Brotherhood. It is also pointed out that the secularist parties have engaged in Islamist-style campaigns, diminishing the uniqueness of Islamist parties and undermining their support, and that, as in Turkey and Egypt, there are no major ideological or class ruptures between secularists and Islamists. Nonetheless, projecting an image of "Muslim-ness" has become an important means of mobilizing political support, and the "Islamic" nature of the media offers material for effective comparative research with the Middle East.

Building on these analyses of individual countries, Chapters 7 and 8 discuss the impact of the Arab Spring on the Middle East as a whole and the issues it poses for the international community. Chapter 7 reviews the situation created when the vector of opposition to authoritarian regimes running across the Arab world has been blocked by vertical vectors stemming from the circumstances in individual countries, and poses the question of how pre-existing political forces, including highly-organized Islamist groups, should interact with new-generation popular movements lacking any organization or guiding spirit following the overthrow of old regimes by these popular movements having no clear-cut hierarchy or leaders. The discussion then approaches the impact these new circumstances will have on the Middle East as a whole from the perspective of Israel, and analyzes the situation in which Israel and other forces seeking to maintain the status quo in the Middle East as well as Iran and other forces wishing to upset the status quo are both seeking to maintain and expand their national/state interests through the trans-border corridors of Arabism and Islam in conjunction with the US' "withdrawal" from the Middle East. Also pointed out is the need to focus attention on the fact that cross-border identity politics based on religious sects and ethnic groups coming to the forefront within countries not only has caused frictions to

erupt within these countries but has continued to create cross-border turmoil spanning national borders.

Chapter 8 discuss the dilemma surrounding “the responsibility to protect” in light of the international community’s differing responses to two serious examples of chaos in the Middle East, i.e., the civil wars in Libya and Syria, both of which feature regimes confronting large-scale popular uprisings and inflicting appalling violence on citizens that they should by all rights be protecting. However, the international community has taken completely different approaches to these serious humanitarian crises. Citing the “responsibility to protect,” a NATO-led military intervention in Libya toppled Gaddafi and effected a regime change. In Syria, on the other hand, no international consensus has been reached and there seem no prospects that effective measures will be taken to halt the violence in Syria and protect Syrian citizens. Underlying this difference is that the strong sense of alarm felt by Russia, China and the other BRICS countries about the regime change brought about by the intervention in Libya. Given that non-intervention in internal affairs in the guiding principle in the “responsibility to protect” concept, the international community finds itself confronted with the dilemma of whether it can fulfill its “responsibility to protect” without overthrowing a regime inflicting violence on its own citizens. In pursuing a military intervention in Syria, there is also the difficulty of finding states or an alliance of states sufficiently willing and able to dispatch military forces to a country descending into chaos, making the dilemma over “the responsibility to protect” an even deeper one.

This concludes the Report summary; policy recommendations based on these analyses and considerations are appended to this summary. Please refer to the preface and the main text following the policy recommendations for details of these analyses and considerations.