

Forum: Advisory Panel on Question of Middle East
Issue: Combating the outcomes of the Arab Winter
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Introduction

The Arab Winter is the term to describe the era after 2014 in the Arabic regions, which took place after the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring refers to the revolutions made by the Arabic countries, which aimed to replace their monarchies with a more democratic structure. The first rebellious action was made by Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution in December 2010. Tunisia's revolution was a success, with a democratically elected office and a new constitution. In 2019, Tunisia was able to go under another election to change its government, being the first Arab Spring country to do so. Other Arab countries also had common reactions to their authoritarian governments. One of the best examples of this is Egypt. Inspired by the protests in Tunisia, the "January 25 Revolution" took place and resulted in President Hosni Mubarak's withdrawal from office ("Arab Spring"). Similar events happened in many Arab countries, such as Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Libya.

Despite the size of the movement, these rebellions didn't end with success, except in Tunisia (Sly). In Yemen, the protests ended up leading to the Yemeni Civil War, and in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood didn't successfully represent the citizens. The issue with these revolutions was that they weren't based on Islamic fundamentalism (Hadzic). This led the Islamists in these countries to oppose the reforms coming with the revolutions. In many Arab countries, wars were unleashed, and this resulted in the death of around a quarter of million people and a huge refugee crisis: reaching numbers up to millions. This crisis directly affected the neighboring countries of the region, for instance, Turkey, which accepted the largest amount of refugees after the Arab Winter. The people that stayed in their countries faced problems such as corruption, economic crisis, media censoring, and traumas. As the Advisory Panel, finding solutions to these problems will be the focus during the conference.

Definition of Key Terms

The Arab Winter

The term “Arab Winter” is used to describe the situation after the Arab Spring movement in the countries that went through the process of democratization attempts. The unfortunate case was that most of the rebellions in these countries didn’t have solid achievements against the dictatorship, except in Tunisia. The unsuccessful uprisings that came from these protests constituted the period of the Arab Winter.

Civil War

“A violent conflict between a state and one or more organized non-state actors in the state’s territory” (“Civil War”). The Arab Spring caused the occurrence of several civil wars in Arab countries, mostly between the sides of the government and the protestors. The civil wars in Yemen, Syria, and Libya are the most violent.

Refugee

“People who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” (“What is refugee?”). The civil wars and the damaged life conditions in these Arab countries led to a massive refugee crisis which carried the problems of the Arabic people to other countries as well.

Authoritarian

“Demanding that people obey completely and refusing to allow them freedom to act as they wish (“Authoritarian”). Although different Arabic countries had different reasons to protest against their regimes, the common idea was seen to be the authoritarian governments that prevented the functioning of democracy. People found the Arab Spring movement as the solution to the fight for freedom.

General Overview

Before the Spring

The main reason behind that initiated the protest in the Arab Spring was the oppressive authoritarian regimes. The problems weren’t getting any better. Human rights, poverty, and corruption were one of the many problems that the Arab people had to face every day. Especially young people were against the ongoing circumstances. University graduates were victims of high unemployment rates. They and their parents have been under dictatorship for decades. Due to the corruption in the governments, they were also not able to trust their representation. The solution was democracy, and for this young population, the way to accomplish it was through revolutions.

How It Started

The proper environment for the rebellions was established, but it wasn't until December 2010 that the protests were initiated. Mohamed Bouazizi and what happened to him was the event that triggered the passion for democracy in the Arab people. Mohamed Bouazizi was a Tunisian street vendor. He was accused of not having a permit by the police. However, the way he was treated was not moral. He was humiliated; a police officer talked meanly to him and slapped him. Because of this, Bouazizi wanted to complain to the governor's office; however, he was ignored. As a reaction to this problem, he set himself on fire that day outside the office, drawing the attention and anger of the public. With the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a new chapter for the Middle East began: the Arab Spring.

Arab Spring Around the Middle East

The protests in Tunisia were an accomplishment. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's dictatorship, which started in 1987, came to an end in 2011 as he stepped down after the opposition of Tunisian citizens ("Timeline"). A new constitution was prepared by the office, and since then, the democratic elections have continued. The first country that was inspired by the revolution in Tunisia was Egypt. The main issue in Egypt was inequality. There was a class structure where a class was more dominant in political manners. In Egypt's case, not only Arabs but other minority groups, such as women, participated in the search for justice and equality. In Tahrir Square, Muslims, and Christians were united, fighting for the same cause. The results for Egypt, however, were different than in Tunisia. The opposition to the authoritarian regime wasn't much different from it. The Muslim Brotherhood, which rose to power after Mubarak's fall, was still an Islamist group. That's why although the protests in Egypt seemed to end with a solid result, the difference was not as significant as in Tunisia.

Algeria was another country that had been impacted by the movements of the Arab Spring. Algeria had already seen some political shifts towards a more democratic system in the late 1980s under Chadli Bendjedid's presidency (Osman). However, in 1991, following a coup made by the Islamist rebels, the Algerian Civil War began, stopping the democratic process. The violent actions of the Algerian soldiers deeply scared the citizens, and during the protest of the Arab Spring, they attempted to prevent this violence while fighting for democracy. As a result of this, the protests weren't as big as the ones in the other countries. Only after 8 years, when Bouteflika announced his candidacy, the Algerian people started mass protests, which was called the Hirak movement. Bouteflika resigned, but the protests didn't end until public gatherings were banned due to COVID-19.

The Arab Winter

In these examples and many more countries of the Arab population, these protests didn't conclude with success. However, these protests were a significant step toward democracy in the Middle East, and clearly, they weren't the last steps. These protests were the first time that the dictators in these countries felt

threatened, and the international community realized they underestimated the Arabic people's passion for dignity (Robinson). However, the negative outcomes of the Arab Spring are also as important as the positive ones. The violence of these protests resulted in around a quarter of a million people's death. Many local wars occurred as a result of these protests, the biggest being the Yemeni Civil War. Moreover, a massive refugee crisis happened in the region, affecting not only these countries but their neighbors as well. For example, a huge amount of Syrian citizens left their countries for their lives' safety which has been threatened by the Arab Winter. While the life quality of these refugees is troubled, the countries that have been home to them, such as Turkey, have been damaged in fields like the economy and tourism as a result of this crisis. More than 3.5 million Syrians are registered refugees escaping from the Syrian Civil War. Other results of the Arab Spring were the increased number of jailed journalists and decreased internet freedom. The media was an essential tool for the Arab citizens, as they both initiated and maintained the protests. Thus, this action taken by the government became an important problem for the protestors. In addition, the Arab Winter resulted in corruption increasing in most of the Arab countries. Libya, Syria, and Yemen are the three countries that had the greatest decrease in their government corruption scores, which was mostly caused by the civil wars that took place. The Arab Spring was a brave movement, but surely it came with its sacrifices.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Tunisia

Tunisia is the heart of the Arab Spring, where it all started. With the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the protests first in Tunisia, then around the Arab countries started. Other than being the first, Tunisia is also special in this process as it is considered the only Arab country which came out of the Arab Spring with success. The citizens' strength over the government's power played a crucial role in this accomplishment. The leader was replaced, and a new constitution was prepared after, solidifying the efforts of the Tunisian people.

Egypt

Egypt is the first country that has been influenced by the protests in Tunisia. In Egypt's case, the Arab Spring led to a short-term success: the president was overthrown; however, the replacement, the Muslim Brotherhood, wasn't ideal for representing the democracy needed, which was the main purpose of these protests in the first place. As a result of this, Egypt didn't show any democratic progress and had a significant worsening in the freedom of the press.

Yemen

Yemeni people's fight for dignity was even more difficult. The leader of Yemen was Ali Abdullah Saleh, and

the military was split between supporting and opposing him. The balanced forces of both sides made these protests grow to the level of a civil war. The Yemeni Civil War started in 2014, with the Rashad al-Alimi-led Yemeni government on one side and the Houthi armed movement on the other (Lackner). During these combats, Ali Abdullah Saleh was assassinated by the Houthis as he was considered a traitor. As the civil war still continues to this date, the problems it brings to the Yemeni people remain an important issue to be addressed.

Algeria

During the start of the Arab Spring, Algeria didn't have protests as massive as in the other Arab countries. The relatively small-scale protests were confronted and stopped by the police forces. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was the president of Algeria during the beginning of the Arab Spring movement, got re-elected as the president in 2014 for a fourth term. In February 2019, the Hirak movement, which is also called "the revolution of smiles," began as Bouteflika announced his candidacy for the fifth term. These protests led him to resign, but the Algerian people kept voicing their problems. It was the COVID-19 pandemic that could stop them from protesting in the streets.

Turkey

The Arab Spring didn't evoke any protests in Turkey; however, it has been significantly influenced by the destruction caused by it due to its geopolitical position. Events such as civil wars and worsening living conditions made millions of Arab citizens leave their countries. As a neighboring country that opened its gates to the refugees, Turkey had massive amounts of refugees coming to them, especially from Syria. Since Turkey isn't eligible to be home to numerous immigrants while having its own ongoing crises, most Turkish people are unhappy with this situation.

Timeline of Events

17 December 2010	With the immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Arab Spring started in Tunisia.
14 January 2011	Tunisian President Ben Ali was thrown from his 23-year-long dictatorship.

25 January 2011	Egyptian citizens participated in the Arab Spring movement against President Hosni Mubarak.
1 February 2011	The term “the Arab Winter” was used for the first time to describe the outcomes coming from the Arab Spring.
18 March 2016	The “EU-Turkey Deal” was signed between the two parties, attempting to stop refugees from coming to Greek islands and helping out Turkey in the refugee crisis.
22 February 2019	The Hirak movement in Algeria started and lasted until the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s withdrawal from his position.

UN Involvement

The UN has been involved with many Arab countries in many different ways throughout the Arab Spring and the Arab Winter. Unfortunately, these attempts to step up for the conflicts in the region were not helpful. In Libya, the UN authorized military intervention, endangering civilian safety (Murthy). The UN also failed in Yemen as it didn’t address social and economic issues as needed. The United National Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution in 2011, which focused on the transition from the Saleh regime, the political aspect of the problem. The UN aimed to be a tool for bringing democracy, but they couldn’t use this opportunity to the fullest extent, mainly because of their unfamiliarity with the atmosphere in the Middle East and their lack of access to the government’s policies.

Relevant UN Documents

What Remains of the Arab Spring?, (1 December 2015, E/ESCWA/SDD/2015/3)

The Arab Spring and the toponymic changes: Arab Spring — Toponymic Spring?, (27 June 2012,

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The Arab citizens' fight for democracy didn't end in the Arab Spring. Starting in 2018, many countries, including Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, had new waves of protests regarding the economic and political problems pursued. These protests are described as "the Arab Summer" or "the Second Arab Spring" due to their similar nature and causes of them. As the Arab Summer is relatively current, commenting on its consequences is not logical; however, considering its similarity with the Arab Spring, expecting significantly different results would be unrealistic, especially with the economic and health conditions worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the refugee crisis in Turkey, In 2016, the European Union gave a fund of 6 billion Euros to help Turkey assist the refugees in the country ("What is"). This was called the "EU-Turkey Deal," aiming to keep the refugees from reaching Greece islands. However, this assistance wasn't enough to tackle Turkey's refugee crisis. Turkey is going through its own economic crisis, and the massive amount of refugees coming from Syria and Afghanistan isn't a problem they can tackle on their own while simultaneously fighting their own problems. To encounter the refugee crisis, more than financial aid is needed.

Possible Solutions

One of the reasons that the protests didn't have solid accomplishments was due to the fact that the ideals of the Arab Spring weren't embraced by all the people and the culture behind them. For example, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, which is still an Islamist organization, won the election because, despite the young population's cause for democracy, the older generation still values Islam over these values. The experts should aim to focus on the roots while attempting to spread human rights within the Arab community. Education can be a tool to accomplish this; however, it is crucial not to breach these countries' national sovereignties while doing that.

The Arab Spring's most heart wrecking outcomes happened in the humanitarian aspect. The civil wars and worsening living conditions in these countries caused numerous casualties and refugee crises. As a measure to address this issue, the international community can be an assistance. For example, Turkey has been the country that opened its gates to the most refugees, which came with its struggles. Ways to direct refugees to other countries that would minimize the burden for the refugee-accepting countries and support them should be found to better both the lives of the refugees and their welcomers. Other than the refugees, those citizens who stay in their home countries and live under conditions of lacking access to their needs, including food and media, should be helped as well. Giving funds for this cause and sending volunteers or

experts to help these people can be ways to do this.

Notes from the Chair

This agenda item is especially sensitive about breaching national sovereignty, as in many countries, the authoritarian regime is the cause of the movements. While attempting to spread democracy, the experts should consider that the related experts could object as their countries' policies might not match the ideas in the written clauses.

For further research, the following sources can be useful:

-Timeline: How the Arab Spring unfolded

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/14/arab-spring-ten-years-on>

-Arab Spring, Revolution, Islamic Awakening, Arab Winter; The Arab Autumn?

<https://www.internationalaffairshouse.org/arab-spring-revolution-islamic-awakening-arab-winter-the-arab-autumn/>

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