Lessons from Afro-Arab Political Uprisings with focus on main causes, impacts, solutions, and preventive mechanisms

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What marks the Afro-Arab space is that it is an eternal one, bringing together the bonds of history, geography, socio-economic, political and cultural interaction, and unity of suffering, struggle, common destiny and strategy. It is a space whose historical and cultural ties were woven over centuries by ancestors. Thus, both Arabs and Africans view each other as an integral part of their own history, present and future with all major religious, cultural and social features as well as common political and economic factors and interests.

As such, intervention between Arabs and Africans is deep-seated in the Afro-Arab legacy and sentiments alike.

Afro-Arab relations are characterized by the fact that they are deep-rooted, dating back to the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary ages. They had never been dominated by hegemony, arrogance and encroachment, as cooperation, understanding and exchange of interests were the essence of these relations.

On the basis of this particularity, the Association of Senates, Shoora and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World (ASSECAA) was established to assume the role of embodying and enhancing this same character, including by strengthening cooperation ties between Arab and African countries while respecting cultural diversity. ASSECAA also seeks to play a more effective role in the international efforts at the elimination of causes of tension and violence, to contribute to maintaining peace and security in Africa, the Middle East and the world at large, and to work towards building up an important bridge of communication and cooperation between Africa and the Arab world to enable the region to harness its potential and benefit from the global trend to forge regional blocs.

The Association pursues a consultative approach to issues related to common interests in various areas of national and international spheres as a mechanism to encourage, support and strengthen socio-economic, political and cultural cooperation between Arab and African countries and the world in its entirety, and to make recommendations and adopt practical decisions thereon.

Accordingly, this retreat is holding its fourth session to deliberate upon the latest socio-economic and political developments taking place in the regions of Africa and Arab world.

This paper mainly tackles the most recent political developments experienced by some regimes in the region. Some call such developments " revolution, awakening and/or uprising, while others tend to describe them as " protest movements". However, all are unanimous that such events are indicative of political crises that led to the collapse of some regimes, and/or reformulation of others with the aim of triggering a revolutionary change replacing such regimes, but rejecting any peripheral reforms.

Aside from delving into the discussion of the accuracy of the term and the extent of its conformity with the concept of" soft or peaceful revolution" , the paper aims to find the compass specifying the itinerary of the region's aspirations in terms of peace, security, stability and prosperity.

This modest research is just an introduction to your invaluable views and remarks. You may opt to either add or delete as you see fit.

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Popular Youth Revolution as the most leading political Development:

One of the paradoxes that may not come to mind   , or so to say, is that Tunisia was the first country to see a regime change through the so-called "soft revolution ,   peaceful revolution and/or jasmine revolution". Despite the fact that Tunisia, as many think, was a more stable and safe country often frequented by tourists and investors from across the world.

It was that kind of country that works towards providing basic and social services such as education , health, and job opportunities, and taking care of   culture , modern science and scientific technology. Per capita income was relatively high over there .

Further, Tunisia   adopted the idea of announcing   2010 the "World Youth Year" . Its government has been able to obtain an international consensus on such an idea. To this end, it hosted   an international symposium entitled " Youth and Today's Challenges", which was expressive of   its interest in this social segment , and indicative of its efforts to share this interest at the international level. It was barely one month after the symposium was held when the youth revolution broke out only to be joined by opposition parties. A similar revolution ensued in Egypt, spilling over into several countries with different political systems,   which prompted other political systems to review such revolutions , anticipate the eruption of similar ones and take precautions to prevent other breakouts . Some even sought to   make The Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings insignificant. As such, these uprisings have so far looked not   up to the standards of the challenges they have taken up , prompting some to call them " half revolutions", in the sense that they have succeeded in overthrowing the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes, but have not yet succeeded in re-building a better alternative political system.

However, the crux of the matter is not the success or failure of any revolution, as this wouldn't put an end to surprises, especially if crises are still being handled with reactions.

Regimes and research centers are being criticized for not paying an adequate attention to future studies in such a manner that enables them pre-empt events, crises and revolutions. Indeed, studies are usually conducted on the heels of an event and/or crisis. So being, they are more of a reaction and less of a pre-emptive effort to prevent upheavals. This is true in the case of the popular youth revolution in Tunisia, which has taken many by surprise.

So, what are the hidden factors that led to the triggering of the revolution on the part of the youth, the broadest social segment, which constitute 75% of the total population?

This questions makes it imperative to address the root causes for the youth-led revolutions . in fact, the regimes believed that they have done their best to meet the needs of the youth, including by building social, cultural and educational institutions, such as schools, institutes, and universities, among others, incorporating them in youth organizations, and cultivating their energies, talents and inventions.

The most noticeable interest shown by such regimes in terms of caring for the youth has been apparent through engaging them in physical sports, regional and international sporting activities, with football topping the list of such interests. However, such efforts coupled with huge financial spending have never resolved youth problems altogether.

Indeed, what should be brought into focus is the issues and concerns disturbing the youth and their families, such as the economic concerns related to work conditions, the inflationary spiral, and inability to achieve family instability and attain aspirations, let alone the incapability to absorb scientific and technical knowledge. This resulted in the youth losing confidence in themselves and their society in a way that prompted them to seek risky references, which, in turn, pose a real threat to social peace, security and national identity.

There have been emerging amongst the youth weird phenomena such as violence, extremism, aggressiveness, drug abuse, alienation , suicide and other forms of immorality.

The regimes and their youth institutions didn't act properly to face challenges and tackle their root causes in order to salvage the situation before it spins out of control. They also passed over the serious changes that took place, over the recent decades, in the lives of African and Arab communities and the world as a whole.

The changes taking place in the world of today make cultures and societies more interwoven and interdependent on each other than ever before. Therefore, what is happening in any part of the world would , no doubt, directly affect other regions elsewhere.

The new developments in the fields of telecommunication and electronic communication have resulted in all of us living in the backyard of each other more than we were before.

The current communication revolution is instituting a new society freely opening up to new spaces , while youth traditional references, with their mental tools , technical instruments, and limited scholarly production, are falling short of catching up with the technological developments.

Moreover, political parties and organizations are not the only bodies polarizing and co-opting the youth, perhaps due to political and intellectual sterility and/or unavoidable traditional stereotyping.

Consequently, they look incapable of keeping abreast of progress, and of fulfilling the demands and aspirations of the youth. Instead, they ended up looking for new political references in order to freely express themselves and articulate their own objectives. For this purpose, they utilized the communication revolution, including by forming online "Virtual communities" that bring together same-minded people.

So, blogs , face-book and twitter have come to replace the actual traditional communities as a vehicle to demonstrate viewpoints and interact with others in respect of a variety of socio-economic, cultural and political issues. Such tools also serve as a means of political

participation involving the exercise of political rights by means of electronic voting and demonstrating opinions on draft laws debated by parliaments.

Blogs have become a free space through which the youth can share their concerns and seek new ways of how to well organize themselves for the purpose of getting their legitimate rights denied by regimes. This led a broad cross-section of youth influentials to think that they have every right to take up leading positions and get better job opportunities , even if they are not qualified for such posts.

Such practices in turn led a broad cross-section of the youth on the other side to get disappointed with such regimes that confiscated their own rights and got obsessed with all forms of financial and administrative corruption, including bribery and commission in public and private sectors. Such regimes usually indulge in facilitating transactions for businessmen and foreign companies, abusing public funds and helping confidantes get leading positions through what the youth call "minor corruption". On the other hand, macro corruption involves big entrepreneurial transactions , arms trade, monopoly on trade agencies in favour of gigantic multi-national companies , and political, bureaucratic practices that turn higher bureaucratic positions into a means of amassing ill-gotten wealth.

The Communication revolution, coupled with Wikileaks documents, enabled the youth to unravel the concealed forms of graft practiced by their own regimes. As a result, they have become increasingly disgruntled with the regimes that trespassed on their rights and caused unemployment and unequal opportunities. This made them reject this bitter reality via various ways, the simplest of which are immigration, introversion , idleness and alienation.

Most importantly, other youths resorted to highly dangerous references in order to escape this harsh reality. So, most of them fall into the trap of violence and extremism.

However, the vast majority of the youth set out to revolt against their regimes via face-book. This falls in line with the training provided by

some regimes ,through Western NGOS ,to elected elements from civil society organizations and youth leaders with the aim of boosting the performance of civil society organizations, particularly in the countries whose constitutions provide for political pluralism.

Accordingly, the civil society organizations joined hands with youth revolutions, thus making opposition parties, involving disparate factions, obliged to join forces with youth uprising based on the adage " adversities bring together those afflicted".

This suggests that communication revolution and digital media played a pro-active role in sparking changes in the form of peaceful revolutions. However, the sudden breakout of such revolts doesn't mean that they have come out of nothing or have erupted within social and political vacuum. Rather, they are an integral part of the reality and the social make-up of the regimes; they are also expressive of a long-term accumulation of problems within the regimes' sociological structures.

Furthermore, such uprisings were not isolated from the world that saw peaceful changes and revolutions. Since 1980, non-violent struggle has managed to topple dictatorships in Estonia , Latvia, Latonia, Poland, Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia , Slovenia, Madagascar, Mali, Bolivia and the Philippine. Other Resistance movements adopted peaceful struggle to establish democratization in countries such as *Nepal, Zambia, South Korea, Chile, Argentina, Haiti, Brazil, Uruguay, Malawi, Thailand, Bulgaria, Hungary, Zaire, Nigeria and different parts of the* former Soviet Union, where they played a significant role in defeating the hard-line coup staged in August 1991.

However, it is too early to compare the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions to those of Eastern Europe, Latin America and South East Asia, as both are still being tested. In addition, such two revolutions are still constituting an unstable situation, a crisis to be added to the current circumstances disturbing many Arab and African countries that are either fearful of revolutionary spillover or have already witnessed

some sort of violence that poses a real threat to their own security and social peace.

Actually, Arab and African regions are interconnected , meaning that they have common concerns that necessitate joint action to contain crises and extract some lessons that enhance cooperation, peace and stability as a prelude to reaching wider horizons in terms of nation building and comprehensive development.

Learned lessons:

Based on the above, we can extract many lessons, which, if properly heeded, may herald a promising future. The first such lesson is that all should believe that change is one of human life laws   as well as an inevitable corollary. So being, none should be oblivious of this fact, because nothing remains unchanged.

Further, change doesn't go against stability, rather it may be one of its preconditions. In fact, stability doesn't mean immobility or stagnation. Instead, it means harmonizing conditions , rules and regulations. As conditions keep changing steadily, so are the rules and regulations.

This suggests that not keeping abreast of such conditions and circumstances would generate confrontations and explosions, thereby destabilizing the countries in question.

Thus, change is a normal thing regardless of any political and administrative circumstances surrounding it. However, such circumstances would make calls for change more legitimate.

Therefore, unlike random change, the occurrence of any change as a spontaneous and reasonable response to the requirements of unceasing advancement would certainly bring forth safe consequences.

Crises and uprisings breaking out in Africa and Arab world are just a product of negative accumulations suggestive of inability to keep up with change and carry out overriding reforms. Indeed, the performance of regimes is still not up to the

expectations of their people, because they are incapable of performing their functions properly due to the fact that corruption is growing steadily. Hence, it admits of no doubt that the current conditions experienced by most Arab and African countries do indicate that the majority of such countries are enduring political crises affecting all stakeholders . This implies that power, opposition, revolution, government , popular movements and parties are in crisis, with observers being at a fix.

In other words, when it comes to political awareness or performance, the current crises are mainly a product of the above factors combined. They are also a product of "the other", and a product of our world and age. Such crises happen due to the weakness or absence of institutional state, weak institutional loyalty, weak structure of civil society, low awareness of democratic values and practice, and non-participation in decision-making . They can be also attributed to the confiscation of rights and freedoms, though constitutions provide for the features of political and democratic systems, the establishment of institutional state, guaranteeing rights and freedoms and achievement of social justice.

The existence of crises in any nation state doesn't mean that the reformation of its regime have reached an impasse, as reforms are still on track.The road to reform starts from rectifying the reality rather than ignoring it. Indeed, nation states regardless of their disadvantages have become a universal truth. Thus, they should be rebuilt on the basis of national culture in order to embody their values and aspirations and to assume the responsibility of enhancing democracy and engaging various political, social and cultural forces in decision-making.

-It is a blunder to restrict the existing crises to specific regimes, as this would not radically resolve such crises, because it didn't look into the nature of the social fixture and its mechanisms responsible for generating the regimes that are different in forms, but similar in content.

-If we just look into a particular crisis-as we are doing now- and restrict it to particular parties and/or individuals, we shall never give up such insignificant analyses and spontaneous and seasonal political theories in abundance in the African and Arab arena.

Such theories, which raise debates amongst various Afro-Arab parties and camps, are actually governed by one set of similar objective factors. Therefore, those in power, who are more responsible than others for what is going on now, have been frequently changed and then replaced with highly-placed national and popular elements. However, no tangible results have been seen yet.

Therefore, we cannot effectively tackle political problems if those outside power keep imputing all problems to authorities rather than looking into the depth of the political structure of existing regimes that would control any opposition coming to power as was the case with so many opposition parties that took office, but were worse in terms of governance than the former regimes.

So, what is required now is to quit the "game of musical chairs" according to which the power is transferred and then look into the background of the whole game, the kind of the political music controlling the whole game and the nature of collateral structure.

Hence, there should be no justification for trading accusations , looking for excuses, and raising futile conflicts that would only waste time, fritter energies and getting countries embroiled in crises and dilemmas.

-Any change movement in Africa and Arab world may not guarantee success for itself , except if sets out to seriously deal with the reality without ignoring its modern and traditional components, including elites, the general public, minorities, majorities, workers, students and youths.

-The establishment of institutional state would ensure stability in addition to resolving the socio-economic, political and security crises destabilizing several countries and placing them at the risk of fragmentation.

Therefore, if the concept of the institutional state was not adopted, then political systems will remain instable, while political action will be irrelevant to the concerns of the general public , thereby expressing the views of minority groups that practice it for the purpose of misappropriating public funds and abusing citizens' rights. Political action can reflect disputes among different orientations and parties that thrive in the climate of opportunism and self-centeredness. In this case, it will be related to false promises, thus becoming a means of fraudulence and misguidance .

-The implementation of human rights principles in Africa and Arab world is a prerequisite for reforming the political , economic and security situation, as the reality of human rights is still harsh and indicative of a worsening situation.

Though constitutional and statutory legislation provide for human rights guarantees, they have never prevented violations of right to life, torture , political assassinations, manhunts , arrests and harassments in terms of citizenship rights, including right to accommodation, residence, freedom of movement , freedom of expression, freedom of assembly , right to work and other economic rights. The degree of human rights deterioration vary from one country to another, as some regimes are still banning social and political organizations and syndicates.

The relationship between power and opposition parties- as we have just stated above- is still not governed by specific standards and stable democratic values. Thus, the right to opposition is still being surrounded by mystery . It is also still tinged with a good deal of misconceptions , especially with those who haven't yet absorb democracy and its game rules, whether they are inside or outside power.

Further, reality hasn't yet recognized the right to demonstrate different opinions. Nor has it applied the rules of the game in terms of peaceful transfer of power, which, if adopted, would constitute a solid background for democracy that represents a socio-economic and political system working towards building a strong society and modern institutional state.

-The way decisions are made in most regional regimes is one of the reasons for the deteriorating political situation; the nature of decision-making doesn't differ from that of power, rather it reflects it together with international and regional impacts as manifested in the socio-economic , political and cultural circumstances.

It can be also noticed through the relationship between power and opposition as well as political forces and pressure groups that often play no role in decision-making, except if requested to do so when need arises to bless decisions, even if they were wrongly made. This is aimed at misleading the public opinion into accepting such decisions, and at containing reactions, something which accounts for the current political situation prevailing in the region.

To tackle such a situation, decision-making should be rectified and freed from sentiments, whims and spontaneity which are characteristic of totalitarian and despotic regimes. This also requires the participation of all political and intellectual forces to redress the social and political ambiance and create a democratic awareness that contributes to the creation of a climate conductive to the growth of judicious decision-making to be embraced by all, being a national process emanating from public will.

Our Afro-Arab communities don't lack economic, intellectual and political theories, rather they lack a unified popular and political will to create a political and economic grouping depending on its cultural intermarriage and geographical neighborliness . This grouping shall clear the way for a promising future that would liberate such communities from hegemony over their potentials, and help them avoid calamities and crises.

It shall also enable them foil the conspiracies hatched against them, such as border crises, not to mention intellectual and economic dependence, cultural distortion, deprivation of moral and material resources ,

and dismembering the economic and political unity of their countries in order to turn them into domains of influence.

-The circumstances of African and Arab countries may not be redressed unless concerted efforts are exerted to establish strong political systems based on the principles and values of freedom, social justice , human rights, democracy, development and independence that suggests people have their own freedom and dignity. Such principles combined would enhance peace and security and achieve economic prosperity and social welfare.

To elaborate more, the paper focused on why youth opt for revolutions , which necessitates addressing the challenges facing them.

Indeed, youth are just a mirror reflecting social and political environment that involves values, notions, customs and traditions, and lifestyle with its positives and negatives. When the collective outcome of the communal forces is negative and dominated by conflicts, paradoxes and backwardness, it reflects on the youth through mental and psychological distraction as well as other problems that vary based on the degree of communal paradoxes.

We have seen the impact of communication revolution, and regimes' negligence of their duties to the youth, who resorted to face-book revolution in order to grab their own rights confiscated by those, who had already led similar peaceful uprisings. However, the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions have so far stalled, and have been unable to achieve their own goals. Therefore, it is wise not to draw both revolutions into violence.

-All stakeholders-political systems, power and opposition, schools, families and societies- should make substantial efforts to meet the needs of the youth, including by rebuilding societies and nation states properly, taking into account the issues raised in this paper, as well as the following matters:

-A special attention should be paid to the process of building family being the nucleus of society and the first incubator of the youth. This also includes caring for women in a way that enables them honor their mission of raising children.

-Taking care of schools, redrafting textbooks of all educational stages, and upgrading teaching methodologies so as to fit the needs of the youth and their society. This also involves inculcating the values of moderation and tolerance into their minds, and enhancing national loyalty in order to prevent them from resorting to violence and selfish interests.

-Civil society organizations and political parties and organizations should assume an effective role in engaging the youth in political life , and preparing them   physically and morally in order to enable them shoulder their responsibilities

-The youth should be integrated into the important sectors of public life as key stakeholders whenever possible. Their political and intellectual needs should be met by incorporating them into the councils of schools and municipalities, and training them in bearing responsibility.

- The youth should be given the chance to freely and gradually choose the curricula that better suit their age and mental abilities and help cultivate   their own critical sense.

-Working towards helping the youth interact with the subsequent developments and accelerating changes stemming from the technological revolution , while including such developments in well-studied plans intended for promoting youth work both at present and in the future.

-Creating an environment conducive to such subsequent developments so that youth work can serve as a suitable means to face various challenges and flexibly adapt to accelerating changes. In addition, there is need to utilize youth energies and invest their leisure time in the service of environment and local community.

-Youth institutions should develop their human resources in order to prepare youth leaders with the objective of cultivating their energies for the betterment of such institutions and the society as a whole.

- youth cultural centers as well as scientific, literary and sporting forums should be established and their performance enhanced in order to bring the youth to the highest level of professional and psychological maturity, and invest their leisure time properly in such a way that benefits them in particular and their society in general.

-Educational facilities, including schools and universities, state institutions, and the whole society should assume the responsibility of developing the spirit of excellence amongst the youth in the light of communication revolution that establishes new information community opening up to various fields and depending on intellect as the most precious wealth to face the challenges of competition and rivalry.

-Enabling the youth , the most important pillar of human development, to upgrade and utilize their own capacities in order to meet the requirements of the present and foresee the future based on highly developed policies and strategies. Further, equality and equal opportunities should be enhanced in order to create a favorable climate for invention and innovation, and to ensure the right of youth to get jobs and live in a corruption-free environment.

Last but not least, this paper didn't cover, but never ignored, all the events taking place in the Afro-Arab arena, including political concerns and challenges. This is because many such issues had been already debated during previous retreats while others shall be addressed during this meeting. The researcher deemed it fit to submit this humble presentation , being one of the most prominent political variables and future determinants.