Review

African Union and the North African Political Turmoil: Unity in Diversity, Challenge for [Con]-Federation

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Abstract

More than three years passed since the occurrence of North African political liberalism. Middle East and North African communities have been suffering from tyrannical authoritarianism for tens of years. Similarly, many African states have been encountering considerable political turmoil, such as dominant overarching power of one party system (or political dictatorship), e.g Cameroon. Nevertheless, military interruptions were among other disturbances that lingered democracy enrichment in countries, such as Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Guinea, etc and the west has neither taken concrete action in solving the problem nor letting Africa go its own way in solving its crises.

Keywords: Background of the uprisings, African Union, North Africa sub-region, Stances of other African states, Role of AU in the political upheaval in the North, United States of Africa.

INTRODUCTION

From the regional perspectives, Africa is widely divided into two divisions: Arab white in the north and indigenous black Africans in the remaining zones. These classifications religiously overlap; Egyptian Arab might be Christian or Jew from Morocco as black Malian or Senegalese might be Muslim and speak classical Arabic language. Geographical demarcation keeps countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia and to some extent, Mauritania in the Northern part of Africa, but the world political shift of today considers them part of the Middle East. Finally, the Arab League, which has nothing to do with non-Arabic speaking nations, gave North African states membership to take part in its meetings as well as summits. Notwithstanding, Egypt had been suspended from the League due to the peace treaty agreement, which Sadaat signed with Israel, then was later on readmitted in 1989 with full membership; Amr Moussa, the Egyptian national, was the Secretary General of the League from June, 01, 2001 till June, 01, 2011. Moussa handed over the office to Samir Nasibi, another Egyptian. Egypt is the second afflicted countries by the political uprisings after Tunisia, which boiled up in the first round.

Background of the Uprisings

The power-hunger regimes of Mubarak, Gaddafi and

Ben Ali were believed to be among the most tragic tyrants ever documented in the recent history of North Africa. Like any society in the world, Arab and North African communities were thirsty of what is called liberty and political freedom. They need good governance, transparency and peaceful transition of power, tired with one-man one party or one system of governance, abhorred too little too late. They need not less than the basic human needs.

Tunisia, a small country with around ten million populations, leads a change beyond the North Africa's political arena for mistreating twenty-six year old person "by policewoman who also fined him for illegal vending and confiscated his merchandise" (Beinin and Vairel, 2011: 238) over his vegetable cart in the course of earning livelihood for himself and his family in Sidi Bouzid province of Tunisia. The event led to the wide range of revolutions and resulted in terminating the powerful regimes with an iron fist in the region. From the bottom of its roots, this wave, apart from Tunisia and Egypt, where the story is clear or Syria, where open revolts turn to civil war; the process has extended to Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian territories, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Sudan.

In its 6th March 2011 report on Middle East and North Africa, the Global Issue narrated that "throughout the Middle East and North Africa, civilians' protests and

revolts have erupted as people's frustrations with their conditions appear to have boiled over…" (Online Magazine, 2011) In the case of Tunisia, Ben Ali could bring about positive change in democratic setting of Tunisia, after replacing the first President after Tunisia attained independence in 1956, Habib Bourguiba, the one whom had been forced to surrender power in 1987. Due to the circumstances of Habib's regime, Ben Ali's starting point was highly bright. He freed political prisoners and initiated political dialogue; peoples were clapping for the new regime of Ben Ali. In the following year, 1988, old regime's ministers were replaced with the new capable figures as supporting tools to Ben Ali to process better Tunisia" (Global Issue, 2011).

It was less than one decade when two elections were held in 1989 and 1994, Ben Ali emerged as the winner of the both. Instead of avoiding the previous mistakes, Ben Ali dominated all over the state apparatus with iron fist. Ben Ali managed to drive Tunisians tyrannically for longer than two good decades. Similarly, Hosni Mubarak was second only to the 1975 Egyptian President, Anwar El-Sadaat and President of Egypt in 1981 followed by cruel assassination targeted Sadaat. Mubarak have been said to be one of the longest President known in modern history of Egypt since Muhammad Ali Pasha. Mubarak stood shoulder-to-shoulder with US, especially in 1991, when he allied George Bush Sr. in Gulf War against Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Apart from the language, religion, tradition or regional similarities between Tunisia and Egypt, the types of government could solely influence Egyptians to join the historical revolts.

The 'Global Issue' annotates that some of the protests focus on jobs, unemployment, corruption, etc, while others on historical divisions. Therefore, all of these local, regional and global issues were combined together in various and potent ways especially in the hands of the large populations of unemployed but well-educated youths. Some protests have been non-violent, while others, to some extent, were having certain degree of miseries.

African Union (AU) and North Africa Sub-Region: Arabs vs. Indigenous Sub-Saharans

Since ever before the recent North African crises, political interval between the Africa's regional organization (AU) and Arab North Africa seems not too much cohesive. AU constitutes on binding the African society for integration, prosperity and peaceful coexistence. It aims at representing a dynamic force in global arena, regardless with colour, language, tribe, religion, sex and economic condition of individual member states within the boundaries of African territories.

Some foreign missions have been trying to over-take AU in some rising issues in Africa. Chinese Online Magazine 'People's Daily Online' (English version) reported that the EU representative for foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton "has been mandated by EU leaders to go to both Tunisia and Egypt to pass on the message of the European Council to local authorities…" although, the Egyptian government has already indicated that her visit was undesirable for the time being.

Despite excusable refusal from the Egyptian authority, Ashton spokesperson declared that "…we have seen the press communiqué of the Egyptian foreign minister but, in any case, what is important from our perspective is that Madam Ashton has mandate from the EU council Ashton would meet with government officials and opposition groups in Egypt in order to help address public grievances and support an orderly transition to a broad-based government." The then Chairman of the AU Dr. Jean Ping spelled out in an interview with BBC regarding peculiar circumstances of the North Africa justifying that both Ashton and France foreign Minister went to Cairo while uprising, but never consulted AU instead; they seem to be having consultative dialogue with Arab League before going to Cairo.

In yet another incident, the Ping demonstrated that, the peoples of these areas and those who visit their areas are not thinking they are in Africa. Perhaps, geography always tells us that Cairo, Tunis, Rabat, Tripoli or Benghazi are cities in Africa but when you go closer to them the reality indicates that they are not. This is an issue, which no one want discuss it publicly. Regarding Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, when he took up the duty of leadership of Libya forty years back, never thought is African, hence, all of his statements and actions were directed to signify his Arab identity. Gaddafi's proposed United States of Africa was brought about only when his first project of United Arab failed, or Federation of Arab Republic (FAR) under the countries of three who are among the immediate victims of the ongoing turmoil: Egypt, Syria and Libya. Finally Gaddafi has actively agreed to be African as the only alternative he has after his cousins (Arab) rejected his offer.

The pronunciations of the former AU's Chief could stand as a factor to undermine the fulfilment of the responsible role that AU has to play in cooling down regional crises as such. Clearly, AU took no cardinal action against political turmoil in North Africa from the beginning of it. Despite shortcomings that happened in the historical events between AU and some of its member states (supposed) of the Arab Africa, the organization laid down demands concerning Libya's condition. Positively, Gaddafi has had mobilised much of Libya's wealth to build up stronger AU for the sake of uniting Africa. Many experts believe that, the 1999 Declaration, which has been held in Sirte, the hometown of Gaddafi, could be a backbone in prolonging African Union as well as binding and bringing Africans together.

Stances of other African Nations

Some African countries like South Africa proposed AU's investigation on the ongoing conspiracy against Gaddafi. The Ugandan president has declared his opposition against foreign operation in Libya and refused to freeze Libyan-owned assets in his country. At regional level, AU has on 19th March, clearly condemned the strikes on Libya and called on stop of the attacks of United States and NATO on Libya.

AU has criticized the air strike on Libya and established a panel to ensure the immediate stop of it. AU disdained any kind of foreign military action in Libya's crisis or any of the North African states. Simultaneously, many African nations have either took responsibility of taking off their citizens out of the region or ordered to manage and leave the places themselves.

Role of AU in the Political Upheavals of North Africa

On 26th August 2011, the peace and Security Council of the Union (AU) had its 291st Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to brief about the follow-up and the decision taken after 17th Ordinary Session meeting of AU Assembly, held on 30th June and 1st July, 2011 regarding Framework Agreement for a political solution against Libya's crisis. The pivotal issues discussed include ending the conflict, protecting the civilians with immediate effect and providing for humanitarian supports. These proposals were formally submitted to both rebels and Gaddafi's parties and they undertook to respond within stipulated period of ten days.

In Egypt, the African Union, as part of its effort to restore peace and stability in the country, set a panel which met with Egyptian authorities and discussed about the country's peace, security, stability and democracy. AU spokesman, El-Ghassim Wane, pronounced that the AU engages Egyptians to assist them in overcoming their differences, assisting them in diffusing the current tension, assist them in avoiding any escalation violence and further polarization within the society (Clottey, 2013). Following the military coup led by the Field Marshal al-Sisi against the first democratically elected president under the platform of Muslim Brotherhood, the AU suspended Egyptian membership until legitimate leadership is restored.

All of the 54 AU member-states believe that peace can be attained only through freedom, right of the people, social justice etc, they strongly advocate democratic system of government. Though, democracy is a style not yet matured in the region. On the ongoing turmoil, the 'Peace and security council of the AU suspended Egypt from taking part in the entire formal activities of the organization over the coup against democratic elected Morsi and insist that the civilian leadership should take over control of the country. This struggle is dominant feature of the African Union.

AU has been taking appropriate actions during the conflicts, in many Sub-Saharan African states: in Congo, Somalia, Mali, Liberia, Sierra-Leon, Sudan etc. Similarly, as regional body, the same is inevitably expected in respect of the North African states.

On 10th of March 2011, the African Union held "its 265th meeting where Peace and Security Council (PSC) agreed on a roadmap for resolving the Libyan crisis. It is revolved around the following elements: immediate cessation of all hostilities; cooperation of the concerned Libyan authorities to facilitate the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to needy populations; protection of foreign nationals, including the African migrant workers living in Libya; and dialogue between the Libyan parties and establishment of a consensual and inclusive transitional government" (Ping, 2011).

United States of Africa

The United States of Africa was a central vision of many fore-African nationalists including Nkuruma, Julius Nyerere, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, and late Mu'ammar Gaddafi. Despite huge differences that exist among African societies: linguistic, religion, races and colour, history, orientation and background, Africans come to unity and share many natural things, which are very much important than the differences they have. These important shared-values are freedom from foreign intermingling, building developed and stronger economy, and effective foreign policy

This continent has been witnessing number of challenges including poverty, illiteracy, mismanagement and aberrant leadership, lack of social amenities and infrastructures for so many years. Still the paradoxical perplex of this region is very unique in nature in the sense that most of its future leaders were trained and/or live in the West (where industrialization, social and economic development going well), but they seem not ready to bring about positive transformations in Africa. Secondly, the region is blessed with human and natural resources, and simultaneously, the peoples of the region are idiosyncratically rigid in terms of positive response toward modernity and globalization. These and other related menace make African leaders to propose melting off their powers and form single body with stronger organs in and outside the region. Hence, Africa could then appear with stable economy, peaceful co-existence, social inclusion and political stability.

As far as the form of this unity is concerned, there is no form or style comes into light. "The exact structure of this government is unknown. Possibly, it can be either confederate system of government similar to that one of the European Union or federal type like United States of America" (Schmitz, 2009). Lack of full conscious over the ideal unity is going on sluggish motion.

The idea coined after the Second World War, which was part of the anti-colonial movements in Africa. Six

decades past since that time, but the process neither annihilated nor is it being achieved. Its ups and downs, but still the idea remains an ultimate alternative that can replace severe situations of Africa.

Has Struggle Failed?

This ongoing process receives a lot of feedbacks back to the genesis of the foundation. Apart from stand-still condition of the idea, many of the economically and politically powerful countries like South Africa oppose to the unity of the continent. Secondly, the key figures of such movement such as Gaddafi are no longer there. Other countries in the north such as Egypt are in political upheaval. In the west and central regions, the insurgencies and political instability engage countries like Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, etc.

In the east the issue of piracy and militancy across Somali Sea has long back been very much serious. Similarly, the question of encroaching sovereignty of the states gained back from the colonial masters is nevertheless, another strong factor which can easily affect the move. Again, fear of losing influence at regional level is another counter-risky toward the greater authority. For example, Nigeria "enjoys its role in the existing West African Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), which has made significant progress in easing travelling restrictions across the region, and started thinking over pursuance of single currency (Phillips, 2000).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Following the North African crises, the African Union showed up concerns about the tragic events, and therefore, engaged in groping a cold and most appropriate solution, which could afford less bloodbath and minor lose of properties. Overwhelmingly, the whole efforts made by the AU in order to bring the cruel situation of Libya and other affected areas under control, and develop mutual understanding between the two hostile groups through dialogue and diplomatic means proved failed. There was no single proposal out of the AU's demands have been seen through neither from foreign militarily interventions nor from Gaddafi or even rebels' side.

Just prior to the worsening circumstance, on 11th April, 2011 BBC reported AU saying that "Col Muammar Gaddafi had accepted the plan (ceasefire) on Sunday. However, on Monday, his forces attacked the besieged western city of Misrata the rebels also rejected to ceasefire as it didn't include plans for Col. Gaddafi to step down". Similarly , United States, NATO and

Transitional National Council (TNC) backed by the West have altogether rejected the AU's plans of ceasefire, withdrawal of foreign involvements in the Libyan civil war. Hillary Clinton said that "Gaddafi should step down from power. The rebels are gaining strength and momentum. We need to see this through… we will continue exerting the same military and political pressure." (Associate Press, July 2).

Similarly, the actions taken by the organization on the Egyptian scenario, including suspension seem fruitless. The military, despite the immediate response by the AU, holds the country stand-still with democratically elected president in captivity for longer time than the time he spent in presidential villa as Egyptian elected leader. Earlier, during the first instance of the protests, AU Peace and Security Commissioner urged Mubarak to placate the Egyptian angers in exchange with reforms in economic, social and in government branches and parastatals. Mubarak could not adjust, and otherwise, vindicated when it was very late. Seemingly efforts by the African Union towards North African dominating issues are seldom to win high consideration specifically by Egypt, which sees herself more Arabian than African. This is only to prove the challenge of unity in Africa, and arduousness in turning the dream of United States of Africa into existing reality.

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