

Transformations in the Middle East: Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract *The regional security matrix of the Middle East is facing serious challenges since the US invasion of Iraq, which has left a deep impact on the regional balance of power. A hostile nation towards Iran becomes an ally after the fall of the Saddam regime. Things are changing rapidly when several series of protests across the Arab and African region erupted since 2011 with the Tunisian revolution to be first on the list. Muslim countries across the Arab and African region faced regime changes, the rise of non-state actors (NSA) and infighting due to breakdown state institutions. This article explores the evolving post Arab Spring situation in the region and suggests policy options for Pakistan.*

Key Words: Arab Spring, Regime Change, Balance of Power

Introduction

The Middle East is important from geopolitical and geographical location and has always been the focus of the attention of world powers, who tried to influence the region in pursuit of their national interests. This has led to unending intraregional rivalries and challenges from extra-regional powers. Due to the largest oil reserves, it has attracted world powers for many decades. The aspiration of regional influence by intra and extra-regional powers led to the conflict. In the aftermath of the First World War, it fell into consistent turbulence, clashes and wars for a century after the division of the Ottoman empire by France and the U.K and the execution of an outside movement (Zionism). Since the start of the misuse of Oil, it turned into a fight for resources. The Middle East is significant because of its rich history, religions and its vital position and possessing real assets that the most influential nations battle in a kind of non-spoken war. A rich history set apart by various states, populations determining its characteristics since the ancient times. The area which had met the origin of Abrahamic monotheist faiths following their birth in the Levant for Judaism and Christianity and Arabian landmass for the Islamic religion and stretching out their impact to the world with the exception of the nations included or neighboring the Chinese world and various ethnicities in Asia and America. For some reason, it isn't senseless to assume that whoever be in charge of the Middle East be in charge of the world (Raef Gritly, 2018).

The Arab spring has jolted Muslim states resulting in infighting, the rise of rival splinter groups vying for asserting their control over governance. Revolution in several countries has led to domestic instability as well as regional destabilization. The outcome of the Middle East crises has created multiple challenges for

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Pakistan especially on policy level e.g. terrorism, sectarianism, particularly on the bases of Saudi-Iranian proxies and these challenges, are also linked with the development of the country.

There are regional organizations like the Arab League and GCC, but these organizations couldn't unite the regional countries. One of the reasons is the competing interests of the regional states. Secondly the lack of capacity to address the issues of the regional countries. Despite they have shared values, as most of the Arab countries are authoritarian regimes. After the Iranian revolutions, these regimes jointly worked in the form of GCC to coup with any sort of revolution and they have successfully diffused revolution in Bahrain. However, in the rest of the Arab Spring affected countries, their regional organization could not protect their soil from destruction. While in a situation like external intervention, states should adopt a regional approach to defend their region collectively. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the leadership role in the Middle East.

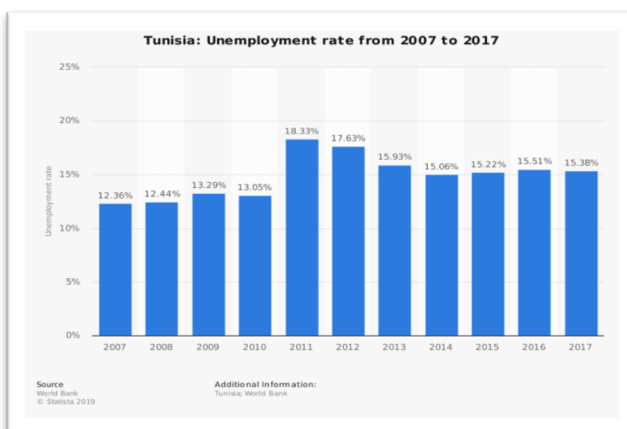
The Arab Spring has also changed the regional balance of power with the demise of the Saddam regime that has favored Iran to increase its influence in the region. Pakistan's reluctant participation in Islamic Military Alliance will have consequences for Pakistan's foreign policy in the long term. Pakistan is enjoying good relations with Arab countries and geographical proximity has given birth to several challenges. This article analyzes the unfolding of events in the Middle East and potential challenges for Pakistan.

Evolving Arab Spring

The term used for the very first time to represent the Arab uprisings in the political Academic Journal of the United States Foreign Policy (Qadir, 2017) by an American political scientist Marc Lynch in his article. Arab Spring denotes a drive of violent and non-violent protests and civil wars commencing from Tunisia on December 18, 2010, stretched to the entire Arab world. The movement started against the long autocratic regimes, the excessive authorities of police and interior ministry against the public, rising unemployment, poverty and inflation in the Middle Eastern states originating from North Africa. To attract the international community towards the ongoing move, social media played a key role as the state media was not broadcasting the actual situation in those states. The states used force to crush the voice of the people turning the peaceful protests into violence as the people also responded to the violence. The common motto of the demonstrators all over the Arab Spring was "the people want to bring down the regime"

Tunisia

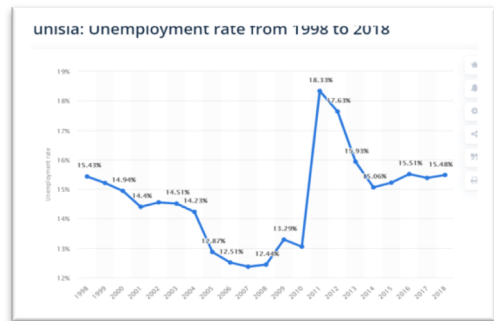
Tunisia was a flagship country in the context of the Arab Spring, where it started, succeeded, and swept across the rest of North Africa and the Middle East. It is here, that some form of stability still persists and governance is making a steady impact on people's lives. The words of Rais Lebled became the anthem of revolution of Tunisia, He said "Mr. President, your people are dead Many, today, on garbage bed. As you can obviously see what's going on nationwide, miseries everywhere and people find nowhere to sleep, I speak on behalf of those who were wronged and ground under feet" (D, Merrak, 2018). The rising unemployment was the main fueling source, which made this remarkable success for the entire region. The following chart depicts the unemployment conditions triggering the revolution in Tunisia (Statista, 2018).



The Tunisian Revolution

Jasmine often prevails over any wall or tree and wraps its creepers. Naming any event or revolution after the colors and flowers are not new in history so is the case with the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia. The Jasmine is a flower representing spring on the one hand and being the national flower of Tunisia for centuries gives its name to the revolution, on the other hand, another facet of the Jasmine flower imparts itself to describe a revolution, that is flower's persistence to cover the area it comes across and its ability to grow constantly (Merrick, 2018). Jasmine Revolution was also denoted by The Facebook Revolution and Freedom and Dignity Revolution.

The revolution is marked by the self-immolation of a 26 years old Mohammad Bouazizi in central Tunisia on December 17 ultimately forcing President Zine al Abidine Ben Ali to step down in January 2011. The government tried to crush the movement with violence, using police force against the public but could not control the boiling unemployed youth of the state. The government's response to the peaceful demonstrators invited international criticism for Ben Ali Regime who initially tried to control them by force and later appeasing on their demands but failed to save his regime ultimately stepping down and leaving the state. The successful downfall of the regime by the public inspired similar movements against the long suppressing autocratic regimes of the region including Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Yemen, Iran, Bahrain, Syria, and Libya experienced significant mass demonstrations demanding political change. Since then the government is trying to bring the economic situation under control but still, the situation is not encouraging.



Unemployment Rate 2019 (Statista, 2018)

Algeria

Algeria also got affected by the Arab Spring as the prices of basic food commodities raised significantly in January 2011. The rise in prices invited a mass protest on the pattern of a protest going on in neighboring Tunisia. The riots spread in the north and Sahara region of the country within days covering 20 wilayahs targeting mostly government buildings, town halls, and shops etc. The demonstrators were suppressed forcefully by the police. In response to international criticism for giving the public freedom of expression and right to peacefully demonstrate, the President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika assured to seek constitutional amendments to reinforce representative democracy and also proposed changes to laws on elections, the media or political parties along with lowering the food prices and addressing the rest of the issues but could not fulfill his promises.

Egypt

As Muhammad Bouazizi's self-immolation sparked demonstrations in Tunisia, similarly another death in Egypt set the people against the regime where a young man Khaled Said was beaten to death by the police. The photographs of his body were set viral and a Facebook group named after Said "We Are All Khaled Said" was created by an Egyptian Google executive inviting thousands of people to become part of it. The public slogan to bring the regime down was raised by the youth and labor activists in the wake of ongoing corruption, unemployment in the state, inflation, restricted media access, and police viciousness. Ferocity between demonstrators and the police caused 846 deaths and numerous injuries (Harvard School, 2018).

The revolution erupted on 25 January, national holiday to recall the British attack on a police station in 1952. President Hosni Mubarak characterized the day as the day of patriotism and sacrifice, for the admiration of Egyptian police but the public did not think so who took the police for a corrupt entity and a brutal instrument of the government. The Egyptians wanted the end of police brutality and law of

emergency enforced in the state inspired by the Tunisian Revolution. The government in response spread police officers around Tahrir Square. The police used tear gas against the protestors and faced retaliation by them with stones and bricks. Tahrir Square became the center of the revolution gathering people in thousands. Though the president tried to ease the situation by making a number of promises the public was not agreed on less than his step down. After 18 days of the protests by public and resistance by the government, on 11 February 2011, Hosni Mubarak stepped down after 29 years and 120 days of his rule as President of Egypt. During the protests, some 846 people were killed and 6467 were injured. (Shinta Puspitasari, 2017). As a result of first democratic elections after decades, Muhammad Morsi was sworn in as President, but he was also removed from office by same angry protesters due to his isolationist policies. The simmering impact is still haunting Egypt.

Libya

On February 15, the protests started against Colonel Muammar Qaddafi in Libya in Benghazi when thousands of protestors raised their voice again the detention of Fethi Tarbel who was a human rights activist. The President instantly chose to crush the movement, which rapidly spread throughout the country reaching the capital Tripoli. Unlike other states, the protests in Libya escalated into a war between the government and the anti-government militia. These armed groups were confronted by artillery, air, and armor used by the Qaddafi army (Nayiri, 2018). The UNSC passed a resolution on February 26 freezing Qaddafi and his circle's assets, restricting them to travel referring the case to ICJ for investigation. In another resolution, Libya was declared a no-fly zone and to use necessary measures to save the civilian from government brutalities resultantly a series of bombing on military installations of Libya by NATO forces (Ibid). NATO's intrusion paved the way for Qaddafi's detention and assassination on August 11, 2011. Since then, the infighting is going on with the turf war between warlord Khalifa Haftar and the UN-recognized government of Libya. The instability is likely to prevail, as no side is ready to compromise.

Post Arab Spring Middle East- Analyses

With the fall of the Saddam regime, the region is facing several challenges. The US intentions were dashed to the ground when Iraq became closer to Iran. However, the hopes stimulated when the Arab Spring started in 2011. Due to the Arab Spring, the authoritarian governments of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen have been toppled while Assad's allies Russia and Iran have neutralized the popular uprising in Syria. In other Arab countries, a considerable protest has been recorded. Although these protests have remained peaceful e.g. Morocco, Oman, and Lebanon except Bahrain where violent protests have been demonstrated. As a result, these authoritarian governments compelled to introduce reforms. (Lydia Khalil, 2018) There is uncertainty in the region today. These politically motivated protests have given birth to instability in the region. One of the worst outcomes of these protests caused the greatest rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran ultimately led to a further Shia-Sunni division. It is the most adverse effect of the Arab revolution as the gap between Shia and Sunni widened. This ultimately caused the catastrophic for the unity of Muslims on common issues globally e.g. the Palestinian cause. The fall of the Saddam regime led to Shia revival in the Middle East. For the first time in history a Shiatic government has been established in Arab soil. Consequently, other Shia dominated areas but ruled by Sunni minority started witnessing turbulence, e.g. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The close relationship between the newly established government of Iraq and Iran has further intensified the tensed relations. Shia Crescent Iran, Iraq, Syria and Yemen have changed the traditional balance of power in the region (The Shia Crescendo, 2015). The expected collapse of Bahrain will further add fuel to the situation. Today Iran is present in Iraq checking on ISIS and supporting the Bashar Al Assad regime in Syria and also have some sort of presence in Yemen, therefore, Iran has successfully expanded its influence. The US policy towards the Middle East has severe implications on the region since 2003. Many of the US partners were not happy over the Iraq conflict.

The post-revolution peace and stability mechanism, especially in Egypt, Syria and Yemen, has further widened the gap between America and GCC states. In the same way, American allies in the Middle East were not happy with the US-Iranian Nuclear deal (AH. Cordesman, 2015). Nuclear deal 5p+1 signed during Obama's tenure was revoked by Trump administration that was not welcomed by the rest of the world including its allies. This has further led to uncertainty in the region. During this period, the US policy towards Israel has remained consistent. While in the same period, America has not played its role to settle the issue between Israel and Palestine. After Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as Capital of Israel, the USA has lost its credibility as a mediator in the conflict and the unilateral decisions further intensified the situation. Initially, the USA supported the uprising in Egypt but when Morsi came into power with an overwhelming majority, the USA remained neutral against the military coup. In Syrian theater, the USA supported regime change and oust Bashar al Asad. However, Russia and Iran came to assist Bashar and since 2011 Bashar al Asad manages to survive. Russia supported Gaddafi and tried to sort out some diplomatic solution to the conflict, but did not succeed to help Gaddafi to remain in power. On the other hand, China through One Belt One Road has extended its influence in the Middle East as well and there is speculation that China is devising new Middle East policies and trying to fill the space created by America. European Union is mostly engaged in humanitarian assistance in the Middle East since the region is a war theater for more than two decades. Some of the key causes of Arab Spring are poverty, unemployment, high inflation with low purchasing capacity of the general masses, and lack of political and civil rights led to the Arab Spring. The political instability and the change in the traditional balance of power in the region, growing sectarian tension have now become more pronounced.

Intrastate Fighting in Syria

What started in 2011 as mass shows against the cruel governing body of Syrian president Bashar Assad has transformed into a fight among foe bunches split along religious, ethnic, and ideological lines. Moreover, the normal conflict has turned out to be altogether internationalized, with a large group of remote on-screen characters mediating in the contention, either straightforwardly or through intermediaries. These on-screen characters incorporate, Turkey, Gulf Arab states, Iran, Hezbollah, United States, and Russia. At present, the Assad regime is clear victor supported by Russia and things on the ground have changed to a large extent. The U.S. mediations in the area have remarkably its exorbitant what's a more, counterproductive assault of Iraq in 2003. After some months, American strategists confront a movement of troublesome choices that will impact Syria, and additionally the Middle East's geopolitics for a considerable length of time to come (Robert Barron, 2018.). Since the beginning of the conflict, America has not had an obvious approach to address the war's various perspectives: terrorism, severity, instability, human evacuation, and geopolitical context. American interests in Syria are talked about, and potential exercises have never been clear or charming, as they routinely work to the disadvantage of various methodologies, decisions, or accomplices. Locally, US voters are sick of outside wars with vague goals or end dates. The fundamental U.S. objective in Syria is the repugnance of terrorists' assaults on Americans partners. Different objectives incorporate the upkeep of global standards on weapons of mass demolition, limiting the potential long haul impacts of expanded impact for performing artists antagonistic to America (Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah, among others), limiting regional decay or flood to neighboring states. After Iraq, Syria was the potential challenger to the security of the state of Israel, so systematically this threat has been neutralized. Series of events took place after the Arab Spring, the first and foremost is American acknowledgment of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and occupation on long-disputed Golan Heights have uncovered the western agenda behind Arab Spring. The Arab countries remained silent over these two international events. Systematically strong militaries have been targeted and weakened.

The Rising Phenomena of ISIS and ISIL

Joe Barnes stated, as president, Donald Trump has sustained and amplified the armed struggle alongside ISIS initiated below predecessor. In 2017, this procedure accomplished exceptional victory: the caliphate affirmed by Islamic State forerunner Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2014 has to a great extent been vanquished in the war zone. With the tumble of the Syrian municipality of Raqqa ISIS' center, which after stretched out over enormous wrappings of Syria and Iraq has been shrinking to a mass of communes kept an eye on by a couple of thousand battered warriors. This does not imply that ISIS never again speaks to a test to countries in the locality and to another place. ISIS demonstrated to become multiple menaces: it was unreal-state, a modifiable place below its prompt has power over, and a psychological militant association, arranging assaults and moving others. The physical caliphate might be nearly termination however ISIS as a terrorist risk stays particularly alive. It has partners of changing qualities not simply in the Middle East but rather in various nations over the Muslim world (Joe Barnes, 2018). The Trump organization's way to deal with U.S. outside arrangement is a mind-boggling blend of the new and the standard. This is particularly evident when we move past the president's own one of a kind talk most very on demonstration in his Twitter network to the frank straight sequence of the act, the region is no exception. The case for coherence in U.S. strategy is solid with regards to ISIS, which detonated on the region scene with its grip of the significant Iraqi metropolitan of Mosul in 2014. This does not imply that ISIS never again speaks to a test to countries in the area and someplace otherwise. ISIS captured a compound danger: it was; an unreal state, a managing region beneath its instant regulator, and extremists groups, sorting out assaults and motivating others.

The physical caliphate might be nearly annihilation however ISIS as a psychological oppressor danger stays especially alive (Saphora Smith and Michele Neubert, 2018). At one measurement, the fight against ISIS has recently been an area if, starting late, a fundamental one of our persistent method for battling jihadist fear-mongering since 9/11. Here, afresh, there has been wide movement between the procedures of the Obama and Trump governments. Complexities have essentially included mark. Now Trump America has widened Obama's automaton program, trapping jihadist campaigners in the region; more overseas, in Afghanistan, the president has stretched US military. The US linger functioning with friends in the locality of altering dependability to lessening the danger exhibited by jihadist communal dealings. US association with one normal collaborator Istanbul is mainly flimsy. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is visibly disenthralled with the Trump rule for what he considers the U.S. strengthens for Kurdish uprising in Syria (Nabih Bulos, 2018). The recent killing of ISIS leader in Syria is a huge victory for the USA and those battling against the rising influence of ISSI across the region, therefore, point towards caution optimism on prospects of enduring stability in Syria and the wider region.

Arab- Israeli Conflict

US arrangement for the Middle East has profoundly influenced the Arab nations, which came about Arab-Israel war 1967, 1973 and also Palestinian issue, is yet to be settled after over seven decades. The story proceeds here, Israel struck on Lebanon, Skirmishes with Syria and numerous wars battled with Hezbollah, Hamas, and Al Fatah. US support to Israel has destabilized the neighboring states. The U.S. association with Israel depends on the greater part-time of close personality binds. Whereas no recognized protection settlement exists, Washington's concealed obligation to Israel has been rehashed by each U.S. President. In spite of huge endeavors by John Kerry Secretary of State, accomplishments to place a peace-making agreement among Palestinians and Israel have not been effective. Concord connections that grasped a number of Middle East lawmaking issues for a considerable length of time have retreated in obvious significance. Israel, from one perspective, may feel increasingly anchor with the Egyptian and Jordanian understandings and different perilous neighbors like Syria and Iraq in the disturbance. In any case, if that shakiness removes the present governments in Amman and Cairo, those understandings could wind up helpless. Along these lines, there are contrasting translations of Israeli security today. In May 2011, Obama

recommended the need to recognize the position of the border before the war of 1967, which can lead to amicable settlement to be viable. Benjamin Netanyahu responded that those edges were "unstable" (Hans Binnendijk, 2016).

Saudi Arabia

Post 9/11, the Saudis appeared to be deceptive; as 15 of their residents were involved in the 9/11 incidents. Saudi secretive treasuries reinforced Wahhabi fundamental communal events. As such, the Saudis took action against financing for al Qaeda. Regardless, the majority share rules framework progression supporting the US with a continued uncertainty towards Saudi Arabia. The signing of the Vienna nuclear accord with Iran has seriously made Saudi Arabia anxious taking it as a spread of Iranian influence into the neighboring states. It further raised their fear by the rapid surrender of Mubarak, a continuing Saudi assistant, and the way in which the US did not use air power to oust Assad in Syria. The King of Saudi Arabia decided to move to link his relatives to develop relations with the US. Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has also joined hands with the United States on counter-terrorism assignments; which may trigger future instability inside the Saudi renowned family (Barron, 2018). The alliance of the US and KSA is unlikely. One is the world's most ground-breaking majority rules system, whereas the other is the most radical government in the world. Despite these contradictions, both the states have enjoyed a friendly relationship for the past 7 decades. Saudi Arabia provided oil and the United States gave security. Saudi Arabia has around one-fifth of the world's exhibited oil spares and conveys around 10 million barrels for consistently. It has regularly utilized adaptable generation to balance out oil markets, a lot to America's favorable position. It was decided by the US in the late 70s to mid-80s to share F-15s and Airborne Warning and Control System to KSA, which was required to carry out Operation Desert Storm to protect Saudi oil reserves from Iraqi aggression. Directly the US has overwhelmed Saudi Arabia as the biggest producer of oil; Saudi markets are expanding till Europe and Asia, and security relations have ragged over Iran" (Peter Bergen, 2014).

Analyzing Policy Options for Pakistan

It is the basic principle of Pakistan's foreign policy to develop friendly relations with all Muslim countries. Pakistan remained neutral whenever a conflict between the Muslim countries erupted. The statement from foreign office "*we do not interfere and we do not take a side*" (Pakistan Foreign Office, 2014) shows the explicit foreign policy toward Muslim countries. However, it is a tough challenge for Pakistan to uphold its neutrality when the Yemen conflict erupted which is directly linked with Saudi-Iranian enmity. Saudi Arabia expressed its desire to seek help from Pakistan in the war against Yemen by incorporating it into an Islamic military alliance. The Saudi request to join the war against Houthi's put Pakistan into difficult foreign policy choices. Iran has opposed explicitly, Pakistan's involvement in the conflict. Any sort of Pakistani involvement could bring sectarianism into the country and with disastrous consequences. Pakistan is already feeling isolated regionally, facing challenges from its Eastern border and southern border. The only western border is secured from where there are some threats but on a small scale. Therefore, the only border having the least security forces could be a serious challenge for Pakistan. On the other side, there is a considerable ratio of Pakistani Diasporas living in GCC states sending a large number of remittances to the country will also be at risk. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia always helped Pakistan whenever Pakistan was in need, so it was nearly impossible to remain neutral in this situation. Pakistan successfully maintained its neutrality. The option to join this alliance was not approved by the Pakistani Parliament. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif made two trips to KSA to make them sure that if KSA's security being challenged Pakistan will not hesitate to respond to any kind of threat. (Pakistan Foreign Office, 2015). The war in Yemen is not yet concluded, it will be challenging for Pakistan to adopt an explicit foreign policy. However, shuttle diplomacy by Prime Minister Imran Khan to Iran and Saudi Arabia is being viewed positively, and constructive engagement with all sides is the only way forward to remain relevant in the current situation.

The Middle East and Domestic Challenges for Pakistan

The crisis in the Middle East can cause sectarianism in the country, as has been witnessed in the past in Quetta and Ashura events. On the other hand, the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran in Pakistan cannot be ignored. If we look at the history of Pakistan, sectarianism started with Zia's Islamization policies. Considerable numbers of people have been killed in sectarian violence. Between 1989 to 2014, some 4734 people have been killed in sectarian violence the report is being published by South Asia Terrorism Portal. Behind this sectarianism, the Saudi-Iranian proxy war can't be neglected (M. Qasim Zaman, 1998). The conflict in the Middle East would further fuel the sectarian division in the country. Many experts believe that if Pakistan had joined the war against Yemen, it could have fanned the sectarianism in the region. Some of the religious fanatic getting inspiration from the ongoing conflict in the Middle East can form similar terrorist organizations like ISIS. That could be a considerable challenge (Amir Rana, 2015). While internal division on foreign policy over Yemen is also a challenge for policy formulation. On the other hand, Sunni Deobandi and Ahl e Hadis were in favor of war, while the Shia population is apparently supportive of Iran. So, the internal Shia Sunni division can't be neglected due to the transformation in the Middle East.

Recommendations

Pakistan should remain neutral between KSA and Iran and play its role as a mediator to resolve the issues of the Muslim ummah. Shuttle diplomacy is a good starting point that has gained a reasonable degree of acceptance, therefore, should be pursued in the future. Domestically, the interfaith harmony and foolproof mechanism for addressing people's grievances should be adopted. The poverty alleviation and provision of employment as promised should become a reality to avoid the Arab Spring in Pakistan. Above all, a fresh look is suggested on account of our regional policies to make peaceful co-existence a reality. Removing interprovincial disharmony and strengthening of state institutions must remain as priority agenda for bringing lasting stability in the country.

Conclusion

Being in the contiguous region, Pakistan cannot ignore the developments in the Middle East. Comprehensive recommendations have been suggested to make our Foreign Policy robust, relevant and Pakistan cannot afford any destabilization due to several fault lines. Therefore, a holistic approach and inclusive policies out of zero-sum prism will guarantee our national security.

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