

# The Turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, and Western Neo-Interventionism\*

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THE POLITICAL and social turbulence that began in Tunisia towards the end of 2010 swept through the Arab world. Apart from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, mass protests occurred in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), among which six suffered the most: Tunisian President Ben Ali was forced to flee abroad; Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak resigned under severe domestic and international pressure; Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was shot to death and his government was overthrown; mass protests in Bahrain were suppressed; Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh transferred the throne to his Vice-President Hadi in exchange for an immunity. At present Syria is being targeted by Western powers for regime change and arousing international concern. Moreover, the conflict between Iran and the United States is intensifying and the peace talks between Palestine and Israel remain at an impasse. The MENA region is trapped in a prolonged, chaotic complex.

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I. REGIONAL TURBULENCE AND WESTERN NEO-INTERVENTIONISM

OVERALL, the turbulence shows that the domestic conflicts in these countries were intensifying in many aspects. First, the rising costs and unemployment rates impaired the quality of living. For example, the unemployment rate for those between the ages of 15 and 29 in Tunisia was as high as 52 percent; nearly half of the Egyptians lived below the poverty line; and Yemen was listed as one of the least-developed countries in the world. Second, the fact that “strongmen” had held power for a long time, the highly centralized governments were riddled with embezzlement and corruption and reluctant to reform, the absence of democracy, etc., all stimulated strong discontent among the public. Ben Ali, Mubarak, Saleh and Gaddafi had ruled for 23, 30, 33, and 42 years respectively. Third, although U.S. policies toward the Middle East hurt the interests and feelings of the Arab people, some governments there still chose to cooperate with the United States. This brought disappointment and humiliation to their people. It is thought-provoking that the unrest first broke out in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, which had good relations with Western powers. Fourth, the inherent tribal, sectarian and national conflicts in Arab countries intensified. Fifth, Islamist extremism and the Western discourses of freedom and democracy have greatly influenced Arab society from two opposite sides. All these factors led to unrest in the Arab world, gave expression to the Arab people’s dissatisfaction with their current backwardness and their strong desire for change, development, and a new way to revitalize the Arab nation. Although there were some common reasons for the unrest in the Arab countries, the situations in those countries differed.

When the long-term destabilizing domestic factors burst all at one time, international factors played an exacerbating role. First, the global economic and financial crisis aggravated the economic difficulties of the Arab countries, leading to soaring prices and unemployment, thus igniting people’s dissatisfaction with their governments. Second, the United States, due to such factors as the global economic crisis and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, began to decline from the peak of hegemony, resulting in Washington taking the backseat in international affairs. President Barack

Obama shifted the strategic focus of the U.S. to the Asia-Pacific region and reduced input in the Middle East, thus resulting in a correspondingly diminishing role there. Third, the rise of emerging economies has had a strong exemplary and stimulating effect on the Arab countries. Fourth, the widespread use of the Internet not only provided protesters with more convenience in communicating with one another, but also gave some groups a chance to spread false information, manipulate public opinion and instigate protesters.

The violent political and social turbulence in the Arab world took the United States by surprise, which then began to worry about its dominant position and strategic interests in the Middle East. To pre-empt the rise of anti-America and anti-Israel tendencies, the United States did a lot to lead the protests to “democratic movements” of “anti-dictatorship” and “anti-tyranny,” taking the lead to paste such high-profile labels as “Arab revolution” and “Arab Spring” to them, thus taking the initiative to control public opinion and determine the nature of the turmoil. Thereafter, taking advantage of the unrest, the United States exercised neo-interventionism, did its utmost to guide the direction of the turbulence and even took steps to force changes in the Arab governments that were not very docile to it. First, the United States tried to protect its long-term ally, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, at the beginning, but as the public protests grew throughout the country, Washington changed its attitude to force Mubarak to resign and transfer power to the Egyptian military, which Washington trusted, for fear of losing control of the situation. Second, in Bahrain, where the ruling Sunni Muslims constitute only 25 percent of the population while the remaining 75 percent—the Shiite Muslims—keep close ties with Iran and Hezbollah of Lebanon, the mass protests unsettled the Gulf Arab states as well as the U.S.: if the Shiites took over the government, the influence of Iran would increase. Therefore, with the acquiescence of the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates sent troops to crack down on the protests. Third, al-Qaeda was quite active in Yemen, although President Saleh had been cooperating with the United States in fighting terrorism.

In order to prevent Yemen from becoming another Somalia, the United States, in cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, enabled Saleh to seek “immunity” through “power transfer.” This established the so-called “Yemen model.” Although the vice-president was elected as the president, the real authority remained in the hands of Saleh’s cronies. Fourth, the unrest in Libya was mainly caused by long accumulated tribal conflicts. Despite the fact that Gaddafi yielded to the U.S.-led Western powers following the toppling of the Saddam’s government, the United States and its allies were determined not to let this wayward leader to build up his influence in Africa. They first exaggerated Gaddafi’s crackdown on his opposition in order to impose sanctions on Libya; then, citing UN Security Council Resolution 1973, they launched air strikes on Libya and encouraged the Libyan opposition to expand the scale of civil war. Finally, NATO supplied weapons, sent ground troops and directed the opposition to kill Gaddafi and overthrow his government. This is the “Libya model” of neo-interventionism. The United States is quite proud of this model and some key officials and the U.S. media make no effort to hide their intention to employ this model again. The Libya model includes the following key contents: First, to help establish an opposition that is not only committed to overthrowing the government but also capable enough to provoke a civil war. Second, to seek authorization from the UN Security Council and support from the regional countries. Third, to convince the allies to take an active role and spearhead the intervention. Fourth, to interfere under the banner of “supporting democracy, fighting tyranny and protecting civilians,” aiming to impose regime change.

The U.S.-led Western powers are trying hard to duplicate the “Libya model” in Syria, in an attempt to get President Bashar to step down through such means as political and diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, civil war agitation by supporting the opposition, and military intervention threats.

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Besides, the conflict between the United States and Iran is intensifying. It is an established policy of the United States that no power is allowed to challenge its hegemony. Iran adopted a distinct anti-U.S. and anti-Israel policy after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and expanded its influence in the Middle East by taking the opportunity when the United States was bogged down in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Now, Iran is actively developing nuclear technology, and intends to create a “Shiite Crescent” composed of Iran, Syria, the Hezbollah and the Iraqi Shiites. Alarmed, the United States regards Iran as its greatest threat. To overthrow the Islamic regime of Iran, the United States resorts to such measures as isolation, sanctions and subversion to the fullest yet in vain. In recent years, the U.S. and Israel have threatened to launch military strikes against Iran regularly, but have never put into practice since the consequences of such war would be unbearable. Obviously, the United States and other Western powers are trying to contain Iran, and their policies toward Syria must be understood in this context. As for the Palestinian issue, Israel insists on expanding settlements. Obama, as soon as he was elected president, promised to promote the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, but there has been no real progress due to Israel’s hard line. Still, Obama could not change the U.S. long-standing stance of favoring Israel. Following the upheaval in the Arab world, the Palestinian issue was marginalized with the decreasing attention and less support from other Arab countries and the rest of the world.

The GCC countries, attempting to realize their own goals by relying on the strength of the Western powers, are playing a significant role in Western neo-interventionism. Boasting rich oil and gas resources, the GCC countries have much higher living standards than other Arab countries despite such social disadvantages as autocratic monarchy, conservative thinking, lack of democracy and disparity between the rich and poor. Demonstrations and protests also erupted in some GCC countries at the beginning of the turbulence. Then, the governments of Saudi Arabia and other GCC members promptly appropriated huge funds for appeasement. The United States made the utmost efforts to maintain the stability of the GCC countries, which

have long been regarded as its strategic allies in the Middle East. When Shiite protests in Bahrain were quickly suppressed, the GCC generally maintained stability amidst the turbulence. The population of the GCC is dominated by Sunni Muslims, but there are also considerable numbers of Shiites, who make up 15, 16, and 25 percent of the populations of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait respectively. Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries have been at odds with Iran for a long time due to divergences in geographical interests and sectarian conflicts. Iran is becoming more powerful, developing nuclear technology, and preparing for the “Shiite Crescent.” Iran’s rising influence in the Middle East worries the GCC countries. Taking advantage of the turbulence in the Middle East and North Africa, the GCC wanted to strengthen their own security, defeat the opponents, and control the Arab League so as to consolidate their dominance in the Arab world with the help of Western forces. Having coordinated with Western powers in overthrowing Gaddafi, who had been at loggerheads with the Gulf monarchies all along, now the GCC are trying to overturn Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria, since Syria has close relations with the Shiite-controlled regime of Iran. The Gulf countries support the political rise of Sunni Islamism in Tunisia, Egypt and some other countries. Of the six GCC countries, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the most hawkish. Their extreme statements and actions as well as some decisions made by the Arab League under the guidance of these countries neither represent the common stand of the Arab countries, nor do they serve the fundamental interests of the Arab people.

## II. DEFINING THE NATURE OF THE MESS IN THE ARAB WORLD

THE TURBULENCE in the Arab world was promptly labeled by the United States as the “Arab Spring” or “Arab Revolution.” Exultingly, Iran regarded the turbulence as reenacting Iran’s Islamic Revolution, and looked forward to its recurrence all over the Middle East. Al-Qaeda militants also cheered the upheaval, appealing to Islamic extremists to overthrow secular regimes and set up the Islamic system. The protesters also thought of themselves

as revolutionaries. Various groups defined and interpreted this movement based on their own stands and interests.

Following a period of temporary confusion, the Chinese media were inclined to define it as political and social turmoil, or to call it a “change,” “transformation,” “crisis” and so on. Some people also accepted the phrases “Arab Spring” and “Arab Revolution.” In my opinion, first, this turbulence has fully exposed various conflicts troubling the Arab states, and has manifested the Arab people’s strong desire for change and for an appropriate development road. It is likely to initiate a new epoch in which the Arab people pursue the new development path of rapid economic growth, of social justice and democracy, and of an independent foreign policy. Certainly, this pursuit deserves respect, but it will be a long historical process full of conflicts, struggles, and with twists and turns. Severe turbulence and radical change are likely to be the theme of the Arab world in near future. The turmoil impacted several Arab republics this time and possibly monarchies next time. In this historical process, some countries could possibly experience a revolution in a real sense. Since the onset of the turbulence and upheaval, people have been looking forward to a new independent, strong, vigorous, and prosperous Arab world that would stand triumphant in the world. This goal cannot be reached in the short term, and it is still too early to say that the “Arab Spring” or “Arab Revolution” has come. We should not cater to Western hype. Political and social upheaval is an open process, which can develop into either revolution or turmoil, or, as happened in Libya, military interference and foreign invasion.

Second, emerging out of more than one reason, the turbulence has been pulled by diverse goals, and their developmental orientations are not yet certain. The outbreak of the turmoil was abrupt and at the grassroots level, neither guided by a unified or specific doctrine nor launched by a specific party or organization. Only when it developed into a large-scale movement had the army, Islamic elements, pro-democracy forces, elite groups and Western powers, especially the United States, got involved and attempted to guide it in the direction they wished it to go.

Third, people protested in Tunisia and Egypt for discontent, which eventually forced their leaders to step down. This change

showed some revolutionary features. However, the situation in Bahrain was characterized mainly by sectarian conflicts, and in Libya by tribal conflicts. Behind the unrest of Yemen were tribal conflicts, southern separatists challenging the central government, and al-Qaeda's interference as well. And in Syria, it was caused by sectarian and ethnic conflicts, in addition to social and political contradictions.

Fourth, the interference from the United States and other Western powers to promote neo-interventionism changed the nature of the situation. In Libya, mass protests evolved into military interference and invasion by Western powers. The situation in Syria also showed the hands of neo-interventionism, which turned the mass protests into a "revolution" that suits the interests of the West most, and at least objectively it matches the Western hype and the practice of neo-interventionism.

It is worth noting that this political and social turbulence will be more complicated, last for a long period and produce far-reaching significance.

**(1) The tottering political structure and the rising Islamist forces.** Some changes have taken place in those countries that have experienced power shifts. The first change is political pluralism. Multi-party systems have replaced one-party dominance and different parties are emerging and competing for election. The second is higher national sentiment. People pressed more strongly for independence, opposed the foreign interference and Israel's occupation of Arab territories more firmly, and supported the Palestinian struggle. This is particularly pronounced in Egypt. The third is the rising of Islamist forces. In Tunisia, the Islamic Renaissance Party became the largest party in the 2011 election, and formed the cabinet. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won 47.2 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly, followed by another Islamic party—The Al-Nour Party. Islamist forces grew up quickly as well in other Arab countries. In Morocco, an Islamist party—the Justice and Development Party—became the largest party in the early parliamentary elections, and was entitled by the king to form the cabinet. In Kuwait, the parliament is also



dominated by Islamist forces. In Libya, which has not yet held elections, but the chairman of the National Transitional Council has claimed that Islamic law (sharia) shall be the basis for legislation in the future. Islamist militias that played an important role in overthrowing Gaddafi's government will have a decisive influence in the political arena.

**(2) Intensifying power struggle and turbulent situation.** In the Arab world, the military was an important force to guarantee national independence and the pillar of strongman politics. When the "strongmen" were toppled, the armed forces came to control the situation. Now the era of military regime has passed and the army was forced to stay behind the scenes. The second best organized force after the military is the Islamist forces, and their rise in the midst of the turbulence has been widely recognized. Nevertheless, the secular elements are still influential in the Arab countries and most people refuse to accept extreme thoughts. For the sake of their own development, the Islamist forces would have to be moderate and collaborate with the secular parties. So, the Iranian-styled theocracy will not occur in the Arab World for the time being. The secular democratic forces, which can be roughly divided into the nationalist group and pro-West group, are also gathering strength. The pro-West forces are relatively at a disadvantage as most Arabs are vehemently anti-U.S.. The results of elections in these countries show the democratic forces do not have any advantage. Moreover, there is the major force of the protests that toppled the strongman rule, i.e., the youths who were inspired by passion but were not well organized and did not have an agreed guiding principle or acknowledged leaders. They felt lost as they failed to achieve much in the parliamentary elections in Tunisia and Egypt. Among the above-mentioned forces, an overall and possibly intensifying battle is under way regarding such matters as what paths of development to choose, what policies to be adopted and who will play the dominant role. As for the extremist forces like al-Qaeda, they also tried to expand itself amid the turmoil. It is impossible for them to find a place in government as they are neither supported by the public nor tolerated by the Western powers. Yet, their destructive potential should in no way be

overlooked. In addition, in Egypt there are conflicts between the Muslim majority and the Coptic Christian minority; in Libya, the conflicts among different tribes and militias; and in Syria, the conflicts among different sectarians. Once flared up, these conflicts would be extremely difficult to pacify. All of the above determine the turbulence in the Arab world will go on for a long time, and may even spread to other countries as the conflicts sparking the unrest have not been settled yet.

**(3) Difficult economic reconstruction and harder life for the people.** The reconstruction of the economy and society requires both a peaceful and stable social environment and good governance. The sectarian strife and tribal conflicts, strong anarchist tendencies among the people and interference from Western powers have made it very arduous to stabilize the situation and establish the authority of government, thus causing huge difficulties in economic reconstruction. The unstable political environment has reduced overseas investment, brought production to a standstill and damaged tourism. In the third quarter of 2011, Egypt's foreign investment dropped to US\$0.44 billion, a quarter of the same period of 2010. From 2010 to 2011, its tourism revenue declined from US\$12.5 billion to US\$8.8 billion, a decrease of 30 percent. The Egyptian government announced that in the second quarter of 2011 the unemployment rate was 12 percent, but analysts believed the real rate would be much higher, and as many as 25 percent of the youth were unemployed. The situation in Tunisia was similar to that in Egypt, but was worse in Yemen. The Egyptian media quipped, "Egyptians are freer but poorer."

**(4) Different situations and attitudes in non-Arab countries.** Besides the Arab countries, the MENA is home to three important non-Arab countries—Iran, Turkey and Israel. Iran's role has been discussed above. Turkey, taking a tough stand toward the Bashar regime, is keen to step in Middle Eastern affairs to expand its influence and promote its developmental model. Despite of the growing influence, Turkey will find it very hard to play a leading role in the Middle East, composed mainly of Arab states. The Ottoman Empire once occupied the Arab world, and the Arabs are

still suspicious of its successor, Turkey. As for Israel, it is anxious about the rising Islamist forces in the Arab countries as well as Iran's increasing influence and capability in developing nuclear technology. But it is happy to see the Palestinian issue marginalized. While playing up its threats of launching military strike against Iran in a bid to slow its nuclear pace, Israel keeps a low profile on the turbulence of the Arab World. What it concerns is that its neighbors, such as Egypt and Syria, after regime change, may change their policies toward Israel and threaten its security.

### III. SYRIAN CRISIS: AN INDICATOR OF THE REGIONAL SITUATION

THE SYRIA CRISIS has become a major concern of the international community. Some facts about Syria, however, have been distorted because the Western media has bigger say in international society. Therefore, it is necessary for us to get a true picture about the Syrian issue. First, far from being forsaken by his people, the Bashar regime still enjoys the supports from the majority Syrians. According to the Chinese media, about 60 to 70 percent of the Syrians endorse the current government. The French newspaper *Le Figaro* reports that over half of the people are in favor of Bashar. Lebanese scholars estimate that, among the Syrians, there are 30 percent opposing Bashar, 30 percent supporting him, and 40 percent swaying. On February 25, 2012, the *Washington Post* said that many observers believed the president still enjoyed firm support. Second, why is it so hard to quell the riot? The Syrian government bears inescapable responsibility. Yet the Western powers are not without errors, given they urge Bashar to stop fighting unilaterally and to withdraw troops from the cities on the one side, whereas arm the oppositions and encourage them to refuse negotiation, to incite more conflicts and cause more casualties. With all these arrangements, they then blame the government for all the violence, with the purpose of justifying their further intervention. This is the major dynamics that has kept violence going on. Third, the Bashar regime is by no means the obstruction to reform. On the contrary, the Syrian government has adopted many reform measures, of which the most outstanding one was amending the constitution

and putting into a referendum on February 26, 2012. It is reported that 57.4 percent of the Syrians participated in the referendum, and 89.4 percent of the voters approved the emendation. It is widely recognized that this result is fundamentally reasonable and reflects the majority of Syrians' demand for reform and peace. The Syrian government announced that it would hold a parliamentary election on May 7, and welcomed the oppositions to take part in the competition. That was another significant step of reform. Yet, what the Western powers really want is to remove Bashar instead of reform or reducing civilian casualties in Syria. Fourth, there are many opposition factions without a single leadership and cohesion. Without external military intervention, it is impossible for them to overthrow Bashar's regime. Fifth, the Arab countries hold different attitudes towards the Syrian crisis. Controlled by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the Arab League has passed a resolution on Syria, which was obviously not in line with the fundamental interests of the Arab world. Lebanon objected outright to the resolution. At the "Friend of Syria" conference, Tunisia's president made his definite stand against arming the Syrian oppositions and militarily interfering in Syria by any foreigner. On March 16, 2012, the three Arab countries that had experienced regime changes, namely, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya held a foreign minister meeting in Tunisia and issued a joint communiqué reiterating that the bloodshed in Syria must be stopped and no foreign military intervention is accepted. They claimed that the Syrian issue should be resolved within the Arab framework. Now the silent majority has begun, and will continue, to have their voices heard. And sixth, since the Western proposal involving Syria was vetoed by China and Russia at the UN Security Council, there has been more and more people opposing military intervention, and supporting abandoning violence and resolving the crisis through political means.

In my opinion, there are three options for the Bashar administration. (1) By reinforcing reform, gradually stabilizing the situation and initiating negotiations with the oppositions so as to achieve an inclusive political settlement, it might develop a "Syria model." This is precisely what China, Russia, and Kofi Annan, who is the UN-Arab League special envoy to Syria, wish to accomplish.

The six-point proposal put forward by China has been accepted by not only the Syrian government but also the broader international community. However, the Western powers are not satisfied and they spare no efforts to set up obstacles. As for the oppositions, with the supports from the Western countries, they refuse to compromise. Therefore, this way may not be easily achieved in the short run. (2) The West wishes to duplicate the “Libya model” and overthrow the Bashar regime by military means, but this is difficult to realize. First, the Syrian oppositions are too weak. Second, it cannot be entitled by the UN Security Council, nor can it be supported by most Arab countries. Third, the U.S. and European powers have their own limitations such as economic difficulties, anti-war voices, and the presidential election, which make it too expensive to wage a new war. And fourth, the Western interference in Libya had led to the Libyan civil war, and attacks directly against Syria might trigger a new Middle Eastern war. That would be devastating for all stakeholders. (3) The current crisis goes on, which means the oppositions cannot topple the government, nor is the government able to suppress the oppositions that get supports from the West and some Arab countries. The puzzle implies two possible way-outs: one is that the government takes proper measures, and the situation will gradually move to the first option mentioned above. Another is that the Bashar government is brought down and finally cannot but accept the “Yemen model.” Although the Bashar regime is in difficult plight, it has not yet reached the end of its road. If the first possibility comes true, the mass in the Arab world may be mitigated. But, if the regime change promoted by the West is the result, neo-interventionism will run rampant, looking for another target. This would aggravate the unrest in the MENA.

Western neo-interventionism will not always triumph. The leading role of the U.S. in that region may go on diminishing. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has played a leading role in the Middle East. After the 9/11 attacks, President Bush launched wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, and was trapped there. Dogged by the world financial and economic crises, its hegemony is declining. At the same time, the emerging economies are booming collectively. The leading role of the U.S. in international affairs is weakening.

To maintain its leadership in the world, President Obama has adjusted his policies. The U.S. has begun to shift its strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific region and reduced its strategic input in the Middle East. But on February 28, 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, when attending the hearing on the Foreign Relations Budget for Fiscal Year 2013, revealed five priorities for the U.S. national security and foreign policy. She listed ensuring security in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as the first priority for the U.S.. The Second is to pursue forward-deployed diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific. Focusing on the wave of change sweeping the Arab world is the third most important task. There is an obvious contradiction between placing the Greater Middle East as its primary focus of diplomatic relations and its “returning to the Asia-Pacific” strategy. Does this reflect the United States’ hesitation or its incapability to manage more than one thing at the same time?

The United States is promoting neo-interventionism in West Asia and North Africa, and it may be a sound idea to make use of “smart strength.” Even so, there are many difficulties that make it resort to external forces. No matter how “new” or “smart” neo-interventionism is, its nature is to interfere in other states’ internal affairs and to force regime change in accordance with big powers’ interests. This is equivalent to the big bullying the small and the strong oppressing the weak. It violates the widely recognized international relations principles of the majority of the developing countries, namely, maintaining independence, choosing one’s own development paths and opposing external interference. It is no wonder that neo-interventionism arouses opposition and boycotts in the developing world. As for most Arab countries and other developing countries, the “Libya model” has become a negative one that should never be duplicated. The mainstream of the world today is to seek peace, development, and cooperation. In the guise of protecting civilians and human rights, the West imposes sanctions against those countries that do not obey its command, threatens to use force, and even conducts military intervention and imposes regime change. Such acts, going against the tide of history, are bound to be condemned by the international community. In this Arab unrest, what the U.S. has done can only result in fuelling

anti-American sentiments among the Arab people. Islamist forces have been rising in the political and social instability. It is clear that their ideology and ideal system are in no way compatible with the hegemonic policy of the U.S.. Thriving Islamist and nationalist sentiments of the public will exert increasingly important influence upon their governments' decision. So, after the unrest it is unlikely

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for the Arab countries to cater to the U.S. Middle East policies as before. One case in point is the adjustment of foreign policies by the interim government of Egypt. The neo-interventionism practiced by the West will invite more boycotts and, as a result, the U.S.'s leading role in the Middle East will keep declining, although the foundation of its dominant status in the MENA arena will not be shaken in the short run.

#### CONCLUSION

CHINA and the Arab countries enjoy a long history of friendly relations, without any historical grievances. The relations have been tested in the past 60 years and have been growing deeper and stronger. In recent years, the U.S. hegemony has brought about huge damage to the Middle East. The U.S.'s leading role in international affairs is decreasing; while China's national strength and international status are on the rise. The countries in the Middle East are seeking development paths suited to their reality. In such a context, the Arab countries tend to "look to the East." They have an increasingly strong desire to develop friendly cooperation with China.

During the political and social unrest in the Arab states, China insists on no interference in others' internal affairs, respecting the Arab people's desire for reform, protecting their rights based on the aims and principles of the United Nations Charter, advocating settling divergence and conflicts through dialogue and political

means, and opposing resorting to military force, foreign interference and regime change to resolve the crises. China's position is based on the people's fundamental interests in the related countries, and maintaining regional peace, stability and prosperity. It does not pursue any private benefit, neither favoring nor opposing any side. China's stance can stand the test of time, earning more understanding and acclaim from the Arab states and people. China's selfless stand will promote friendly partnership between China and the Arab countries.