

The Upheaval in the Middle East and China's Middle East Policy

YAO Kuangyi^①

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China)

Abstract: *Due to more than one-year's upheaval, many Middle Eastern countries experienced regime change, and Syria is the next target and center of this political swirl. The rise of Islamic force is a serious problem for these countries in transition to deal with. Because of this upheaval, the Middle Eastern configuration is facing challenges; the contradiction within regional powers is experiencing growth and decline. The adjustment of America's Middle East policy has affected the trend of Middle East situation. China's "non-interference in others' internal affairs" principle gains international society's interpretation, and China's diplomacy towards the Middle East is facing important opportunity and enormous challenges. China should seize the opportunity and seek the new development of China-Middle East relations.*

Key Words: *Middle East Upheaval; Islamic Force; Adjustment of America's Strategy; China's Diplomacy; Middle East Politics*

I. Long-term Trend Will Show in the Upheaval in West Asia and North Africa

Upheaval in West Asia and North Africa have lasted more than a year, resulting in regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and quickly expanded to Syria. The Syrian crisis created a quagmire. Syria

^① YAO Kuangyi, Former Chinese ambassador to many Middle East countries.

is located in the heart of the Middle East, which has a strategic position, and has become the meeting point of the various contradictions in the region. Due to outside forces, especially the United States and Europe's intervention, the internal and external contradictions in Syria superimposed on each other, which have evolved into the Islamic Shiite and Sunni conflict, the struggle between regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran, as well as the geopolitical game between the United States and Russia. After more than one year of contest, the regime of Bashar Asad turns out to have a stronger internal control and the support of the majority of the people, plus the help from Russia, Iran and other countries, while the opposition is fragmented and dispersed thus unlikely to pose a real problem.

China and Russia vetoed the motion involving military intervention and regime change in Syria proposed by the United States and Europe as well as some of the Arab countries in the Security Council, in order to shake the moral support of America's attempt to copy the "Libyan model". The special envoy of the United Nations, Kofi Annan's mediation efforts failed due to the significant difficulties. On one hand, to overthrow the Asad regime is the established policy of the United States, which is also in line with the interests of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other countries. The United States continues to back the opposition, intensify economic sanctions against Syria, to further isolate the Asad regime and force it into submission. Once the Syrian crisis worsens the spillover effects of which will impact the peace and stability of the entire Middle East region. On the other hand, the countries that have been through regime changes have entered the post period of upheaval, but their political and social crisis has not subsided. Faced with the arduous task of economic and political reconstruction, they are about to enter the high incidence of contradictions. The reasons are as follows.

First, from the nature of the upheaval, despite being made up of

endogenous political and social movements, it is characterized by a "no leader, no organization, no program" feature. Various forces mixed and various trends coexisted, forming a temporary union in opposition to the old regime. Traditional Islamic forces, pro-Western forces and the forces of nationalism are bound to start the game to fill the political vacuum left by the old regime. More than 50 political parties have appeared in Egypt, and there are up to 114 legal Tunisian political parties. With the political parties fighting each other, the situation is not stable.

Second, most regime changes were not through peaceful means, but through civil war using violence and even the introduction of external forces. Wars have disrupted the normal operation of the national economy and destroyed people's lives and property. In 2011, as a pillar of the Egyptian economy, tourism income dropped to 9 billion dollars, only two thirds of the previous year, while prices rose by more than 10%. The Arab countries suffered losses of up to 100 billion dollars. In Libya, during Gaddafi's ruling, there were about 4,000 people missing, while in the civil war from February to October in 2011, up to 25,000 people were missing. After the overthrow of Gaddafi, the ruling authorities of Libya persecuted the personnel of the former regime, creating a vicious cycle of mutual retaliation in the country. The UN Security Council has urged the Libyan authorities to take all necessary steps to prevent the bloody revenge (Gu, 2012).

Third, the overthrow of strongman rule, in a broad sense, is a big step forward in the democratization process, but many Arab countries have yet to complete political, economic and social construction of a modern state. The sectarian and tribal organizations are the basic form of society. As the American scholar Samuel Huntington put it, in the Middle East, the state has always been weak, even weaker than family, religious groups and the ruling class (Huntington, 2010). Therefore, the strongman rule often rests on the important ties to maintain these internal tribal and sectarian groups in the country. After the

strongman rule was overthrown, stability is needed in the reconstruction, and authority is required for stability. However, it is difficult to establish authorities accepted by the majority of people in these countries in the short term. As a result, their tribal and sectarian conflicts may be activated again. In Egypt, in addition to the factional fighting, the contradiction between Christian Copts and Muslims has intensified, and the demonstrations have become commonplace. In Libya, nearly 150 tribes make their own demands, and local forces maintain their own militias and defy the central government which has little authority. The eastern part requires autonomy; in the south riots haunt Sabha, and tribal armed conflicts occur in the west, highlighting the serious political and social problems. The country is faced with the danger of secession. Domestic political crisis is not defused in Yemen after President Saleh's safe step-down. Instead, the factions are in the intense game of the distribution of power, and prospects remain uncertain. In short, in the Arab countries, the difficulties of political and economic reconstruction in the turbulent times are overwhelming, and they will enter a new period of continued unrest. To seek changes in the upheaval, and to restore stability during the phase of transformation, constitutes the main feature.

II. The Rise of Islamic Forces Has Become A Grim Task Faced by the Transitional Countries in the Middle East

During this period of turmoil, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups that had been suppressed under the old regimes took the opportunity to emerge strongly and participate in the new process. From the countries where the parliamentary elections have been completed, the rise of Islamic forces has become an indisputable fact. The results of parliamentary elections in Egypt showed that the Freedom and Justice Party formed by the Muslim Brotherhood won

36.6% of the votes and became the largest party in parliament. In October 2011, the Tunisian Islamic Revival Party won 41% of the vote in the Constituent Assembly elections to become the largest party and form a cabinet. In December 2011, the Moroccan Islamic Justice and Development Party, which obtained 107 seats out of 395 in the new parliament, has also become the largest party in parliament. After a few months, a general election was also held in Libya. The chairman of the transition committee said that Islamic law is the basis of the laws. Islamic armed forces played a major role in the war to overthrow Gaddafi, and are bound to have a decisive influence on the political stage in the future (An, 2012). But the rise of Islamic forces does not mean that the Arab world is Islamicized again, nor is it the reproduction of Islamic revival movement in the seventies and eighties. The main reasons are as follows:

First, Islamic thought is still evolving. After experiencing the failure of the Islamic revival movement in the seventies and eighties, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and Western countries' discredit of Islam, many Islamic scholars and organizations have started to reflect on their strategy, advocating the re-interpretation of Islamic doctrines, in order to adapt to the social development needs. The emergence of Islamic "Centrism" is the most important outcome of this reflection. The so-called Islamic centrism is a new trend of thought advocated by the Islamic scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi at the end of the 1980s. Its core idea is anti-extremism and anti-hegemonism. It advocates justice and harmony and that social change and democratization must be promoted step by step through dialogue. It also opposes recourse to violence and pressure by external forces, while advocating the innovation of Islamic laws, continuous renewal and the advancement with times in order to adapt to the continuous development of society. The Islamic centrism thought helps to resist both the Western "Islamic threat" theory and internal Islamic extremism and terrorism, and thus is of positive significance to reshape the image of Islam (Wang, 2010:

October). In June 2005, in the 32nd session of the OIC Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Yemen, the Sanaa Declaration that affirms the importance of the Islamic centrism for the Islamic countries to cope with various internal and external challenges, to realize self-innovation and development was approved. Currently, Islamic centrism concepts are widely disseminated in the Arab countries, providing the ideological and theoretical basis for Islam's self-innovation to some extent.

Second, in order to adapt to the country's political transition in the Middle East, Islamic forces are making self-transformation, showing a trend of moderation, party politics and nationalism. Moderation refers to its claims to become more moderate and rational, its exclusion of radical path in seizing power by violent means, and its focus on peaceful and progressive path to participate in the elections. Its attitude towards the West has also become more rational, the persistent rejection in the past has changed. The so-called party politics refers to the participation in politics of these organizations through the formation of political parties in order to break the legal restriction in some countries in the Middle East to prevent the Islamic organizations directly getting involved in politics. Nationalism is the recognition of the legitimacy of the nation-state, and the focus shifted to democracy and livelihood issues (Liu, Z., 2011: November 24). The spread of the Islamic centrism forces, the moderation and the party-politics trend of the Islamic forces demonstrate to a certain extent that the mainstream of these forces are moving away from the extreme and rigid fundamentalism, an evolution which can provide new ideas for the Arab countries when they explore the path of development suited to their own national conditions.

Third, the secularist system has been present in Egypt, Tunisia and other Arab countries for more than half a century, enjoying a solid foundation and the support of the majority of people. The secular nationalist parties have strength, which constitutes a significant curb

to the development of radical Islamic political parties. Islamic parties, whether to govern alone or in coalition with secular parties, are unlikely to abandon the secular system and take the path of the Iranian-style theocracy. It is important to note that the upheaval also provides space for the development and growth of Islamic extremism. The al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), "al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula", the Libyan "Islamic Fighting Group" and other radical organizations have taken advantage of the chaos brought by the unrest and expanded their forces. These radical forces cannot win the support of the general public, and will not be tolerated by the Western countries, so it's impossible for them to become political forces. However, its destructive energy cannot be overlooked.

Since the end of World War II and the independence of the Arab nations, the national modernization strategy has been gradually pushed forward. However, decades of practice have proved that the choice of total Westernization or of a radical Islamic revival movement does not lead the Arab countries on the modern path to democracy, prosperity and strength. Instead, the internal and external conflicts that Arab countries are facing become more prominent, and the position of the Arab world in the global situation remains weak, which is bound to lead to people's desire for change. Under the double process of economic globalization and the Western wave of democratization, the unrest is the overall outbreak of the political and social conflicts in the Arab countries, and also the new attempt of the population to continue to explore the way to gain national strength and prosperity. Many people of insight have realized that any change in the Arab countries will be accompanied by the struggle between religious and secular forces. Only when compromise is achieved through coalition can equilibrium be maintained between the secular world and religion, and balance can be found between the preservation of the Islamic cultural traditions and modernization of social life, can the Arab countries embark on the path of development

in line with their national conditions and break the so-called “democratic paradox” which is that the loss of “authoritarianism” would release the “devil” of theocracy and that democratization reforms point to the prospects for non-democracy (Liu, Z., 2011). Nonetheless, this will be a long and winding process.

III. The Major Impacts of the West Asian and North African Upheaval

The slow response and swinging attitude of the League of Arab States, which aims at promoting unity and cooperation among the Arab countries during the unrest, as well as its inefficiency to form a unified opinion and the serious differences among the views of its member states, especially around the crisis in Libya and Syria, have resulted in the one-year postponement of the Arab League summit which should have convened in March 2011. In March 2012, the Arab League summit in Baghdad discussed the Syrian crisis. Despite the countries’ call for a political solution to the crisis and support for Annan's mediation efforts, the Government of Syria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other countries kept a hardline. Only 10 heads of state out of the 22 member countries participated, and for the GCC member states, only the ambassadorial level officials were sent. Therefore, it is of the lowest level of participation since the establishment of the Arab League. Egypt, which traditionally dominated the Arab League, is unable to care much due to its domestic political, economic and social issues, with its role declining in the Arab League and regional affairs, which is difficult to restore in the short term. Apart from GCC members, the other Arab countries are also busy enough with their own affairs. The cohesion of the Arab world as a whole is declining and the differences are difficult to reconcile, leading to a further decline in its position in the international system.

However, it is worth noting that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other

GCC countries are unusually active. With their strong financial capability and the GCC mutual defense system, they used the issuance of employment and livelihood subsidies to stabilize the domestic situation and sent troops to suppress the Bahraini Shiite anti-government riots, being temporarily able to control the crisis. They are also involved in the crisis in other countries to expand their influence. For example, the GCC conducted multiple mediations in the Yemen crisis, urging Saleh to peacefully hand over power; Qatar used Al Jazeera to manipulate public opinion to support the opposition in troubled countries, including the provision of military and economic assistance to the Libyan opposition and the support for the Syrian opposition as well as the appeal for Bashar Asad to step down. A summit of the GCC was held in Riyadh in May 2011; the GCC announced that Morocco and Jordan would join the organization. The broadening of membership has included all the monarchies of the Arab world, indicating that these countries hope that solidarity could make them better able to withstand risks, and it also shows that the organization has broken the geographical boundaries for expanding its sphere of influence to the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. As the result, these countries have become the backbone of the Arab world, bringing about an obvious shift of the center of gravity of the Arab world.

At the same time, the region's three non-Arab countries, Turkey, Iran and Israel constantly adjust policy in order to take the initiative to expand their influence, the most prominent of which being Turkey. After Turkey's Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002, it adjusted its foreign policy from "focusing on Europe and ignoring Asia" to "place equal importance on Europe and Asia", taking advantage of its special strategic position for being the link between Europe and Asia to play a role at both continents and expand its influence. Turkey seized the chance during the upheaval in West Asia and North Africa to strengthen the diplomacy in the Middle East,

trying to fill the geopolitical vacuum and to act as a leader of the region. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly said Turkey would play a more active and effective role in global affairs and fight for the rights, justice, freedom and democracy for the Middle East. At the beginning of the Middle East upheaval, Turkey intervened with a high profile. The day after the Egyptian people's revolt, US President Barack Obama called Prime Minister Erdogan and called on Turkey to provide all-round cooperation to help stabilize the situation as soon as possible. The Turkey Justice and Development Party used the special relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, and warned the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood not to be provocative to the national military and governmental institutions, and not to resort to force. The Justice and Development Party considers itself as a guardian of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East countries and tries to promote the "Turkish model", which to some extent affected the development of the situation of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other countries. With respect to Libya, not only was Turkey involved in the NATO's military action against Libya and the first to recognize the transition committee of Benghazi, but Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan also paid a special visit to Benghazi, and expressed his support to anti-Gaddafi forces. After the exacerbation of the Syrian unrest, Turkey announced that the Asad's regime was "illegal" and needed to be overthrown, following the United States and other Western countries. The "National Committee" and other opposition groups outside of Syria are sheltered in Turkey, which has become the main base of the Syrian opposition (Yao, 2012).

Iran is in a relatively complex place in the unrest: on the one hand, regional unrest has diverted the attention of the West, which is conducive to the Iranian nuclear development program and the improvement of its influence in the region. On the other hand, with the adjustment of US policy in the Middle East, the Iranian nuclear issue has been highlighted. Iran faces severe sanctions and the threat

of war from the United States and other Western countries. Also, its economy has become increasingly worse, and the people's livelihood is increasingly difficult. Plus, it is uncertain whether the Syrian Bashar Shiite regime will survive. These factors will all compress Iran strategic room to maneuver.

The turbulent situation in the Middle East, especially the rise of Islamic forces, makes the Israeli security environment deteriorate further. Overall, Israel adopted "strategic silence" of inaction and used the fears of the Gulf countries towards Iran, to highlight the Iranian nuclear issue and push the international public opinion to criticize Iran, and thus improved its passive situation. The rising influence of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other countries moved the region towards the diversity. The strong intervention of the above-mentioned countries has broken the traditional boundaries between radical and moderate countries, so that the countries in the region end up in more complex relations. At the same time, at the instigation of the West, the Iranian nuclear issue is to replace the Palestinian-Israeli dispute and become hot issues in the region.

IV. Adjustment of US Middle East Policy and Its Deep Influence on the Situation in the Middle East

US seized the chance of the regional turmoil and launched the Obama Middle East policy, the core of which is "diplomacy of value" and the means of which is "neo-interventionism". The policy is designed to maintain America's initiative in the Middle East and to remove the obstacles for it to move its strategic center of gravity eastward. One should admit that the unrest in West Asia and North Africa was unexpected for the United States, and the uncertainty of the political situation of the Middle East countries put the United States in an embarrassing situation. Thus the Obama administration's strategic plan in the Middle East was disturbed. After nearly six

months of observation and assessment, Obama gave a speech on May 19, 2011, saying that the United States would take multiple measures to accelerate the democratic transformation of the Middle East, adding that a historical opportunity had occurred in the Arab world and thus a new chapter had started in American diplomacy (Obama, 2011: May 20). Through this diplomatic proclamation Obama made, combined with the diplomatic practice of the United States in the Middle East for more than a year ago, the United States made the following adjustments in the Middle East:

First, the value-oriented diplomacy has been implemented. Obama has committed to promote American values and democratic principles in the Middle East, using Egypt and Tunisia as the examples of successful transition to democracy, and to this end it decided to waive \$ 1 billion of Egypt's debt and helped Egypt to raise \$ 1 billion from the global capital markets in the form of loan for the construction of infrastructure and the creation of employment opportunities. The United States provided \$ 20 billion in contribution to the commitment of "international banks" in the G8 summit, supporting the social and economic reform process in Egypt and Tunisia, expecting a demonstration effect in the entire Middle East region (Obama, 2011: May 20).

Second, the US planned to stabilize the Gulf countries and strengthen their military power, so as to build a Gulf multilateral security alliance against Iran. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries are the important allies of the United States in the Middle East and the forefront to contain Iran. For instance, the headquarters of the US navy's Fifth Fleet operates in Bahrain. These countries are also a major supplier of crude oil for the world, vital to the lifeblood of the world economy, which is why at the beginning of the unrest the United States recognized the stabilization of the Gulf countries as an important part of the new strategy in the Middle East. The United States not only acquiesced in the action of Saudi Arabia and other

countries to send troops to quell the civil unrest of the Bahrain Shiites, but also helped stabilize the situation of Saudi Arabia and other countries in order to ease the shock wave of the regional unrest. In December 2011, the United States announced that it had reached an arms deal with Saudi Arabia to sell the latter F-15 fighters worth \$ 30 billion and allowed \$ 60 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia in the next 10 years. White House deputy press secretary Joshua Ernest said that the agreement had strengthened the US-Saudi relationship and shown the US commitment to enhance the defense capabilities as a regional security element. He also said that the agreement was relevant to fight against the potential threat from Iran.^①

Third, "neo-interventionism" is implemented to promote the change of anti-American regimes under the pretext of "humanitarian intervention". Using the excuse of "avoiding the slaughter of innocent people and a large-scale humanitarian disaster", the United States conducted indiscriminate bombing in Libya, overthrew the Gaddafi regime, and manufactured the "Libyan model", which is to implement neo-interventionism under the banner of "humanitarian intervention". The Libyan War, when compared with the war in Kosovo, shows similarities but also differences. They are common from so-called "responsibility to protect" and different because the US started the Libyan war in a more clever way, clearly marked with the Obama style, which adopts multilateral action alternative to a unilateral action, taking the lead and pushing France, Britain and other countries to cooperate. Also, Obama stressed the importance of the participation of Arab and African countries so as to persuade the United Nations Security Council to adopt Resolution 1973 to legitimize the actions against Libya. Besides, France and Britain played a leadership role, while the United States played a backup role. In addition, the US used Libyans against Libyans in supporting the

^① The United States will sell Saudi Arabia a large number of weapons amounting to \$ 60 billion, Phoenix Satellite TV, October 21, 2010.

Libyan opposition. The adoption of smart power to fight a low-cost, limited war reflects that in the accelerated transformation of the current international system and the balance of power unfavorable to the West, the United States has been unable to directly send troops to launch a new war.

Fourth, the US has increased its efforts to contain Iran and pressured Iran to give up its nuclear program, so as to change the Iranian regime, which is the heart of the US strategy in the Middle East. After Iraq's Shiites came to power, the Shiite arc has been formed in the Middle East, starting from Iran, passing Iraq and Syria to Lebanon. The Iranian-Syrian alliance not only threatened the safety of the US strategic alliance with Israel, but also deeply disturbed Saudi Arabia and other Gulf allies that are ruled by the Sunnis. The United States purpose of containing Syria and pressuring the Asad regime to step down is to break this Shiite arc and to further isolate Iran. In addition to taking measures of diplomatic isolation, military deterrence and network information dissemination, the United States focused on the implementation of the most severe sanctions against Iran's oil exports and financial systems. The game between the United States and Iran has entered a new era, and Iran is facing a more severe situation.

Fifth, the Palestinian-Israeli issue is a difficulty that the United States cannot avoid. Obama reiterated that the United States will promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and even proposed to use the 1967 borders as the basis for division of the Palestinian-Israeli border. The United States attaches importance to the Israeli-Palestinian problem in order to improve the tension between the United States and the Islamic world and to reshape its image as well as to maintain its strategic interests in the Middle East. But the United States "started out off with a bang and ended with a whimper", did not take significant substantive steps. The deadlock of the Palestinian-Israeli issue will be further marginalized, especially

when the region remains turbulent.

The United States has declared a high-profile return to the Asia-Pacific, which is a major strategic adjustment from the overall situation and for the future. Observed from this level, the adjustment of the US Middle East policy is both a measure taken because of the regional upheaval and the necessary preparation and arrangement for the full implementation of the eastward-shift strategy. It can be said that the adjustment of the US policy in the Middle East, is an important part of the shift of its strategic focus from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region. In this turmoil, the United States openly interfered in the internal affairs of other countries, promoting the values of democracy and freedom in the West, leading to the resentment of the people in most Arab countries. Rulers of the Arab countries are inconsistent in varying degrees when it comes to the attitude towards the US: on one hand, they cannot live without the United States; on the other hand, they hate the hegemony of the United States. After this round of upheavals, the Islamic forces have risen in many countries. Even the ideology and concept of governance of the moderates is also incompatible with the US Middle East policy. Therefore, the future of Arab governments cannot be as in tune with the United States as in the past. Overall, the United States will not leave the Middle East, and will continue to maintain its initiative in the Middle East, but its influence is decreasing.

V. China's Principle of "Non-interference in Others' Internal Affairs" Understood and Applauded by the International Community

Facing the changing situation in West Asia and North Africa, China adopted a calm observation and attitude. It adhered to the principle of "non-interference in others' internal affairs" and worked for the reconciliation of the parties as well as promoted the talks of

peace. China mainly considered the following aspects:

First, the maintenance of the stability of the region is in line with regional and international interests as well as China's interests. The demand of the local public for change and to safeguard their own interests should be respected, but China disagrees with the threat of violence and the introduction of an external military force to hijack state power. This is not the proper way to respect and uphold the public's demands. Instead, it could result in the entire country's slide into civil war, with the destruction of the country's economic achievements, and the people suffering a greater loss in life and property. Besides, it would also bring disaster to the regional peace and stability.

Second, to insist on the principle of "non-interference in others' internal affairs" is the most important principle of China's diplomatic thoughts and ideas as well as the basic principle in contemporary international relations. In more than half a century, China has adhered to this principle and developed relations with the Middle East countries, winning the respect and praise of the countries and peoples of the region. In the current situation where significant changes occur, it is more important for China to adhere to this principle, firmly oppose foreign interference, respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries as well as the autonomy of the people, so as to maintain the initiative, to create and expand good relations with all factions to further the development of pragmatic cooperation with all countries.

Third, China has taken upon a positive attitude to make a difference and established a responsible image: (1) China has actively promoted the situation in the Middle East toward relaxation and stability. In the political transition process in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, China has been playing the role of "keeping peace and facilitating talks" to promote the parties concerned to resolve disagreements through dialogue and consultation, and support for the

mediation efforts of the relevant regional organizations. When the new regime in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were set up, China timely established contacts and provided assistance within its capacity according to their needs, resulting in a good response in the local area. (2) China made efforts to safeguard the basic norms of international relations, and played a responsible role as one of the major powers. In discussion of the resolution to set up a no-fly zone in Libya in the Security Council, China based on respect for national sovereignty and the principle of "non-interference in others' internal affairs", insisted on not voting affirmative vote. Taking into account the requirements of the Arab League and the African Union, and focused on the protection of the safety of the innocent civilians, China abstained from voting. But the United States and other Western countries took advantage of this resolution to implement a large-scale air strike against Libya, making the situation further complicated and severe, to which China is firmly opposed. In early 2012, the Syrian crisis worsened. The United States and other Western countries made an excuse of avoiding a humanitarian disaster and stepped in to back the Syrian opposition, exporting weaponry to them in an attempt to overthrow the Asad regime. On February 4, 2012, the Security Council voted on the draft resolution on Syria. Because of the implied forcible change of the current Syrian government and the possibility of military intervention in the future, China and Russia used their veto power. As a result, the motion failed to pass. Since then, China has put forward a six-point proposition of a political solution to the Syrian issue, and dispatched a special envoy of the Chinese government, the representative of Chinese foreign ministers and other officials to pay three visits to the Middle East to talk to the Syrian government and factions, in order to explain China's position to the Arab countries and communicate about the situation, stressing that China did not veto to take sides in the Syria crisis. China has been calling for all parties in Syria to fully cooperate with the Arab League's mediation efforts.

China is opposed to the use of force, forcible regime change and other practices contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Owing to the just position of China and Russia, on March 21, 2012, the Council unanimously adopted a presidential statement to support the mediation efforts of Annan (Xinhua News Agency, 2012: March 4). (3) China has focused on humanitarian issues. China was among the first to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, having offered a total of 5 million dollars and 30 million Yuan, and China will continue to help according to the situation in the future.

Fourth, China fulfilled the philosophy of “people-oriented diplomacy” and maintained the interests of Chinese citizens and businesses. After the unrest occurred, China quickly drew on sea and air forces and withdrew from Egypt and Libya 2,000 and 35,860 Chinese citizens, respectively. These were the largest evacuation operations since the founding of the New China, highlighting the advantages of China’s social system. These actions were also praised by the international community.^①

Fifth, the sustainable development of bilateral relations between China and the Middle East countries continued. The upheaval in the Middle East has not affected bilateral relations between China and the Middle Eastern countries. To the contrary, sustained growth momentum was evident. The high-level mutual visits were frequent. Premier Wen Jiabao and Vice President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. At the same time, the Sudanese President, Mauritanian President, Iraqi Prime Minister, Turkish Prime Minister, President of South Sudan, as well as more than a dozen foreign ministers and envoys of Middle East

^① Online exchange on the situation in West Asia North Africa and relations with Middle Eastern countries with netizens by Daniel Chan, Asian and African Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 10, 2012, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqgj/wjdjt1/index.html>.

countries visited China. In 2011, the trade volume between China and the Middle East countries exceeded 268.9 billion US dollars, creating a record high, and the year-on-year growth was 36.5% (Dong, J., 2012: April 6). The brilliant cooperation between the two sides in humanities, education and journalism fully demonstrated a strong willingness and a great potential on both parties to develop mutual relations.

Overall, China's policies towards the Middle East upheaval are correct and its measures are appropriate. China has successfully changed the past situation of being passively involved rather than actively intervening. China's principled position and flexible and pragmatic attitude, as well as its active participation in the Middle East affairs, have won understanding and recognition of the international community, showing remarkable changes that are taking place in China's Middle East policy, and also that China, as a responsible power is playing an increasingly important and constructive role when participating in global governance.

VI. Opportunities and Challenges Faced by China's Middle East Diplomacy and Its Response Measures

The main challenges caused by the Middle East upheaval can be seen in the following areas:

First, the Middle East upheaval will tend to be long-term, normalized, and possibly further spread. Western China might be destabilized. The Middle East has important geo-strategic significance to China, related to China's real interests of security, energy and market. In 2011, China's crude oil imports from the Middle East reached 149 million tons, 58.8% of the total imports. The same year the trade volume reached 268.9 billion US dollars between China and the Middle East. China's dependence on the Middle East crude oil has gradually increased. And the upheaval in the Middle East, not only

resulted in the surge in oil prices, but once the crude oil supply faces disruptions, it will also seriously affect China's economic security and sustainable development.

Second, the United States manufactured the so-called "Libyan model" on the pretext of "humanitarian intervention", and created a very bad precedent that caused a severe impact on the principle of "non-interference in others' internal affairs" in current international relations. In order to maintain its global hegemony, the U.S. does not rule out the possibility of copying the "Libyan model" in other regions and even around China. China's adherence to the principle of "non-interference in others' internal affairs" and the implementation of the democratization of international relations will encounter new challenges.

Third, in the rise and decline of various forces caused by the changing situation in the Middle East, the movements of the Islamic extremist forces are noteworthy. As the authoritarian rule in the Middle East countries gets loose, al-Qaida and other extremist forces may have another relatively active period, which may directly or indirectly intensify the activities of domestic and foreign extremists and separatist forces in China. Meanwhile, the turmoil also boosted further Turkey's rise; the present regime in Turkey has strong Pan-Turkish sentiment, and has adopted lenient policies towards "East Turkistan" organization within its borders, which also increased the difficulty for China of combating the "three evil forces".

Fourth, the national rulers in the Middle East have developed two obvious sides. Especially when it comes to security and defense affairs, their dependence on the United States has risen. And they are on a collision course with the Chinese point of view in dealing with Syria, Iran and other issues, thus increasing the difficulty of handling regional hotspot issues for China.

However, in general, in the Middle East upheaval did not change the friendly relations between the countries in the region and China,

because of the profound traditional friendship between the countries and China as well as the increase in China's economic strength and international influence. So the factions of the countries in the region are unlikely to deviate from the basic policy of friendship with China. The Middle East upheaval will not fundamentally change the basic orientation of the foreign policy of these countries. They will rely on the United States in terms of politics, military and security, but their discontent with the United States is also developing. In the current international situation, "Looking East" remains the policy orientation of the Middle East countries. Although this turmoil will not change US strategic eastward shift, it did disrupt its pace of strategic contraction in the Middle East, which is in China's favor, if looked from the big picture.

Various contradictions intertwined in the Middle East region to create a very complex situation. Facing this situation, it is necessary to handle the following relations to achieve an effective regional diplomacy:

First, it is necessary to properly deal with the relationship between the stability of the situation in the Middle East and avoidance of getting the United States out of trouble in order to pin down the strategic eastward shift of the US to maintain peace and stability in the Middle East, to stress to resolve their differences through political dialogue and to stabilize the situation in the Middle East as soon as possible. These are not only in the interests of the countries and peoples of the Middle East, but also advantageous to protect China's interests in the region. Therefore, the basic orientation of China's Middle East strategy, should strive to maintain peace and stability in the Middle East. On the other hand, the Middle East upheaval, to a certain extent, contributed to the dispersion of the US effort and contained the strategic eastward shift of the US. Therefore, there is no need for China to get the United States out of trouble.

Second, it should both be taken into account that China adheres

to the principle of “non-interference in others’ internal affairs” and that China's major interests in the Middle East ought to be safeguarded. As has been said above, China has a substantial interest in the Middle East, so events that endanger China’s major interests cannot be allowed to develop. Instead, on the basis of the principles of “non-interference in others’ internal affairs”, China should actively participate in these events and work for the reconciliation of the parties as well as promote the talks of peace through proper guiding, reasoning and other effective means so that the situation can be controlled. As the interests of all the countries are intertwined, on one hand, China should insist on the principle of “non-interference in others’ internal affairs”, and make a clean break with the West; on the other hand, the connotation and extension of that principle are worthy of further study in the theory and practice of diplomacy. China handled the Darfur issue successfully, the experience of which should be summarized.

Third, it’s important to keep a balance between keeping friendly relations with the current regimes and respecting the aspirations of the people for innovation and change in these countries. It should be recognized that despite the tribal and sectarian struggle factors and the interference of the big powers that make the situation more complicated. In essence, this unrest is a social movement in which vast number of people “seeking change and development”, so it is worth respecting and supporting. When maintaining friendly relations with the current regime, we should seize the opportunity to establish contact and dialogue with the opposition, to keep China always in the driving position.

Fourth, China should properly handle disagreements and strife between the great powers in the Middle East. The struggle among Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran around expanding their influence in the Middle East is obvious. China should put itself first when dealing with the above-mentioned countries. When developing bilateral

relations with them, China should also pay due attention to the balance, taking into account the comfort of each country.

Fifth, China should handle appropriately the struggle and cooperation between China and the United States in the Middle East policy. While adhering to the principle of non-interference and opposing the US hegemonic acts, attention should be paid to avoid head-on collision with the United States. China may seek the intersection of interests with the US in certain areas, expand cooperation, and safeguard the overall situation of Sino-US relations.

To properly handle the above relationship, this paper's specific recommendations are as follows:

First, the position of the Middle East should be strengthened in China's global strategy. As an important and special part in developing countries, the Middle East, in politics, serves as China's critical strategic support; in economics, a major market for China's overseas oil and gas supply, commodity exports and for enterprises to implement the "going-global" strategy; in security, a vital barrier to fight against the "three evil forces" and to safeguard national security; in international relations, an important stage from which China handles relations among major powers and expand its international influence. Therefore, the Middle East diplomatic plan should be formulated from this positioning.

Second, the development of bilateral relations should be put at the center of the work in the Middle East. According to the development of the situation and different circumstances, different measures should be taken to consolidate bilateral relations. In the countries where regime change has been achieved, China should focus on the support of their political and economic reconstruction. When universal development of the bilateral relations is made in the Middle East countries, China should focus on its relations with the big countries like Egypt, Algeria, Israel, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. It is vital to enrich the connotation of the strategic partnership between

China and Egypt, Algeria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and other countries and to establish and perfect the working mechanism so that it truly plays a role. China should vigorously develop its relationship with the Asian countries of the Gulf and continue to promote the work of establishing a free trade area with the GCC.

Economic and trade relations are an important lever to promote the development of bilateral relations. In those countries that have undergone regime change, there is the daunting task of economic reconstruction. Iraq, South Sudan, as well as other countries are in urgent need for large-scale infrastructure construction. So, this is an important historical opportunity for Chinese enterprises to accelerate the implementation of "going-global" strategy. For this reason, it is important for China to set up "the Middle East Development Fund" led by states and run by businesses, in order to help Chinese enterprises to participate in transport, telecommunications, energy, mineral resources, construction and development in the Middle East countries, so as to achieve mutual benefits and win-win outcomes. In the implementation of the enterprise "going-global" strategy, it is necessary to avoid the risks, but it is key to also be aggressive. The Chinese ought to cooperate with local enterprises or other third parties to open up the market to further refine and improve "market for resources", "infrastructure for resources" and other economic and trade policies. Emphasis should be put on the assessment of the social and political risks of relevant countries. To this end, it is necessary to establish an investment environment, a risk assessment mechanism and provide comments and suggestions of operability concerning the Middle East for corporation information, which should be operated by the central departments and experts.

Strategic cooperation between China and countries such as Saudi Arabia should be strengthened in the field of oil and gas, to ensure long-term stability in oil and gas supply for China. In the long term, given the increasing uncertainty in the situation of the Middle East,

China's high dependence on Middle East crude oil implies considerable risk. Taking into account the new changes of the current pattern of global energy, there should be an overall study of China's long-term energy strategy, and the focus should be shifted to energy conservation, the development of new energy, further diversification of the oil and gas sources and strong increase in national and commercial reserves of oil and gas. The dependence on Middle East oil and gas should be gradually reduced.

Third, China should actively and steadily take part in the mediation of the hot spots in the Middle East, to highlight its image as a responsible power and ensure its material interests. In addition to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, the recent emphasis should be placed on response to the three hot issues: the Syrian crisis, the Iran nuclear issue, and the armed conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. Regarding the Syrian crisis, the continuity in China's policy should be maintained, and support should be given to Lakhdar Brahimi's mediation efforts, various political dialogues should be conducted as soon as possible to achieve a soft landing of the Syrian crisis. On the Iranian nuclear issue, China should urge Iran to adopt a flexible and pragmatic attitude, but should also put up a fight when the US is jeopardizing China's interests. China should try to keep the momentum of negotiation on the Iranian nuclear issue as much as possible, strive to keep the situation from getting out of control, and minimize the damage to its interests. The effort of working for the reconciliation of the parties as well as promoting the talks of peace should be enhanced to push Sudan and South Sudan to resolve the outstanding issues in a just and reasonable way, so as to avoid the recurrence of war between the two countries, and to protect China's interests in oil and gas as well as in other fields in both countries.

Fourth, the Middle East upheaval will change the power structure of the country concerned and give birth to a new political ecology. China should strive to make connections with all the factions and

establish friendly relations of mutual trust with the new regimes. The strong rise of Islamic forces has become an indisputable fact in many countries. So it is important to keep contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic organizations that have obtained legal status.

Fifth, the Middle Eastern countries are facing social transformation issues. How to handle the relationship between reform, development and stability to embark on the path of stability and development is the issue with which they must come to grips. China may strengthen exchanges with these countries in this regard and encourage them to explore the path in line with their own national conditions. These efforts, in addition to government departments, can also be made by the political parties, the legislative branch and even private think-tanks, so as to enhance China's influence and soft power in the Middle East.

Sixth, exchanges with the Middle East countries in the area of cultural relations as well as the exchange of visits of youth, women and other civil society organizations, should be strengthened, so as to consolidate the public opinion basis of bilateral relations. It is vital to better understand the awareness level of China of the people in Middle Eastern countries and the new leadership that came to power. Under different circumstances, appropriate platforms need to be built and various forms of exchange activities need to be carried out for specific needs. Especially important is to develop know-China and the pro-China leading cadres at all levels to continuously develop the friendly bilateral relationship. This work can be implemented in the cultural exchange programs under the framework of the "China-Arab Cooperation Forum".

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