

The Turbulence in West Asia and North Africa and China's Response

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Some tendencies and characteristics have become increasingly salient from the evolutionary trajectory of the turmoil in West Asia and North Africa region, with various powers embarked on a reshuffling, which will bring about far-reaching impact on the development of this area.

I. Long-Term Turbulence Looming Large in West Asian and North African Region

The turbulent year in West Asia and North Africa triggered chain regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, which are also involving Syria. At the heart of the Middle East, Syria, where various conflicts in the area converge and interact with each other, boasts great strategic significance in geopolitical terms. Due to the intervention from outside forces, especially America and the West, internal conflicts reinforced the external confrontation in Syria, which evolved into a factional conflict between the Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims, a contest between three regional powers: Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran, and a geopolitical game between the United States and Russia. Syria crisis thus has become the focal point of this whirlpool of turmoil. In one year's time, the

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Bashar regime has won the support of the majority at home and endorsement of Russia and Iran on the international front due to its strong control inside the country; the oppositions are split up so that they cannot pose any real threat to the government. In the UN Security Council, China and Russia vetoed the bill initiated by the United States, the West and some Arabian countries implying tacitly military intervention and regime change, which deprived America's moral latitude in replicating the "Libya model". The UN-League of Arab States Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan is now making efforts to mediate between different players, but he is encountering great hurdles. It is the set U.S. policy to overthrow the Bashar regime, which is also in line with the interests of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The United States continued its support of the opposition forces to tighten its economic embargo so as to marginalize and press the Bashar regime into submission. The Syria crisis is still deteriorating, whose spillover effect will have a direct bearing on the peace and stability in the Middle East.

The West Asian and North African nations that have just gone through regime changes are now slipping into the post-turbulence era: They are facing strenuous tasks of economic and political reconstruction, yet the political and social crises have not faded away, implying a high probability of eruptive explosion of conflicts.

This complexity can be attributed to the following three elements:

The game among different political forces will continue in the near future. This round of turmoil is an endogenous political and social movement in nature, but is featured by "no leadership, no organization, no action program", in which various forces and trends of thoughts get mixed. Under the banner of fighting against the old regime, different factions came into a temporary coalition, but the traditional Islamic forces, pro-Western forces and nationalistic forces are bound to struggle for the political

vacuum left over by the old regime, which has been evidenced by the fact that more than fifty political parties cropped up in Egypt and 114 in Tunisia. Political parties compete with each other, foretelling a chaotic situation.

Violence will not ease in the predictable future. In most countries, regime change was not materialized through peaceful means, but realized through civil wars by resorting to the use of violence or even external intervention. Warfare distorted the running of national economy and damaged the life and property of the people. In 2011, tourism as the pillar of Egypt economy witnessed a downfall to US\$ 9 billion, which accounted for 2/3 that of the previous year, while prices rose by more than 10%. Over 25,000 were missing in the Libyan civil war between February and October 2011. After Gaddafi was thrown out of power, the Libyan authority persecuted politicians of the old regime, which plunged Libya into a vicious cycle of retaliation. The UN Security Council has urged the Libyan government to take all possible measures to prevent the bloody retaliations.

Political stability will not be realized in the short run. Overthrowing dictatorship is in the broad sense a great progress in the democratization process, but a lot of Arab countries have not yet accomplished the political, economic and social construction required of modern nation-states, with religious factions and tribal organizations as the essential social structure. As is rightly pointed out by Samuel Huntington, in the Middle Eastern region, weak governments are the norm, weaker than families, religious groups and ruling cliques, which means that dictatorship served as an important link joining tribes and factions in the country. After the dictatorship was overturned, stability, which presumes authority, is essential to reconstruction. It takes time for these countries to establish authoritative regimes acceptable for the majority of the people, which implies a possible heightened conflict between factions and tribes. In Egypt, other than factional struggles, conflicts between Muslims and the Christianity Coptic

have yielded a great many public demonstrations. In Libya, more than 150 tribes harbor their unique political pursuits, with the east voting for autonomy, the southern Sabha plagued with riots and the west witnessing armed conflicts. Local forces maintain armies and defy orders from the central government, which is on the verge of collapse. In Yemen, the domestic political crisis has not been resolved after Saleh's resignation from his presidency. Different factions are still struggling for benefit, which adds more unpredictability to the future.

In a nutshell, the political and economic reconstruction of Arab countries in the post-crisis era is impeded by various hurdles, which will usher in long-term turbulence. It will emerge as a main feature for the evolution of these countries to seek reform amid turbulence and pursue stability amid change.

II. Upsurge of Islamic Forces

Since the conclusion of the Second World War, newly independent Arab countries have taken turns to embrace modernization strategies. But the past decades' experience has demonstrated a tried-and-trusted truth that neither Westernization nor radical Islamic Revival Movement can lead Arab countries onto a democratic and rich modernization path. On the contrary, Arab countries are now confronted with more severe internal and external conflicts, which led to the weak status of Arab world in the global structure and would incur some revolution-style changes. This outbreak of turmoil can be interpreted as an outbreak of political and social crises in Arab countries, which were impacted by a convergence of economic globalization and Western democratization waves, and a new endeavor made by the public to explore new approaches to revitalize their country. In this turmoil, such long-suppressed Islamic organizations as Muslim Fraternity took this opportunity to get more and more involved

from on-lookers to free-riders and then to participants. Looking at those countries that have gone through legislative elections, the upsurge of Islamic forces has been materialized. The legislature election in Egypt has indicated that the Freedom and Justice Party affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood has won 36.6% of the votes to become the biggest party in the congress. The Tunisian “Islamist Nahda Party” has in the constitutional conference won 41% of the votes to be the majority party responsible for forming a cabinet. The Justice Development Party, a Morocco Islamic party has secured 107 seats in the 395-seat congress and was acclaimed as the biggest party in the congress. Libya is also welcoming its general election. Abdul Khalil, chairman of Libya’s National Transitional Committee, proclaimed that Islamic law will serve as the basis for law making. In the fight against Gaddafi, Islamic military forces play a major role and will be increasingly more important in the future political arena.

But the upsurge of Islamic forces does not necessarily mean the re-Islamization of the Arab world, or a repetition of the revival movement of Islam in the 1970s and 1980s, which can be accounted for by the following three dimensions:

Islamic centrism is rallying more and more support. After the failure of the Islamic Revival Movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the demonization of Islamism by Western nations, many Islamic scholars and organizations began to reflect on their history, advocating a reinterpretation of the Islamic teachings so as to meet the needs of social development. The Islamic “centrism” can be indicative of this reflection. The so-called Islamic “centrism” is a school of thought advocated by prominent Muslim scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi, which can be boiled down to the following elements: extremism and hegemony should be opposed and justice and harmony should be observed; dialogue and progressivism should be applied in advancing social reform and democratization; resorting to violence and external

pressure should be abolished; innovation in religious teachings and relevant issues should be embraced to meet the needs of social development. Islamic centrism is of positive influence to counter the theories of “Islam threat” advocated by America and Western nations and guard against internal extremism and terrorism so as to reconstruct the image of Islam. In June 2005, the 32nd Foreign Minister Conference of Organization of Islamic Countries adopted the Sana'a Declaration, affirming the significance of Islamic centrism to Islamic countries in coping with internal and external challenges and realizing self-innovation and development. At present, the Islamic centrism is well propagated in Arab countries, which to a certain extent provides an ideological and theoretical foundation for the self-innovation of Islamism.

The Islamic forces are showing the tendencies toward de-radicalization, nationalization and evolving into political parties. De-radicalization means they tend to embrace more rational policy initiatives, renouncing violent means as a viable access to political power and advocating participation in election campaigns — a peaceful and progressive path to political power; they also become more rational in dealing with the Western nations, abandoning the past antagonism. They tend to evolve into political parties in the sense that they get involved in politics by establishing political parties so as to break loose from the legal constraints set by some Middle Eastern countries on some Islamic organizations; Nationalization means they recognize the legitimacy of nation-states, shifting their focus to issues of democracy and people's livelihood. The popularity of Islamic centrism, the softening and party-oriented efforts of Islamic forces indicate to a certain extent that the main streams of Islamic forces, in order to get adapted to the political restructuring in the Middle East, are improving themselves, giving up the extremist and rigid fundamentalism, which is offering new inspiration for Arab countries to seek a development path that conforms to their national conditions.

Deep-rooted secularism becomes more salient. The secular

regimes, having existed in such Arab countries as Egypt and Tunisia for more than half a century, have won the support of the majority of the people. Secular nationalistic parties are very influential in the political circle, which serves as an effective counterbalance to the development of Islamic parties. Islamic parties, either as the ruling parties or as members of the ruling coalition, cannot afford to discard the secular system to embrace theocracy. Even if some extremist Islamic forces like “al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb”, “al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsular” and “Libyan Islamic Fighting Group” exploited the chaos to expand their influences, they can never be incorporated into the political parties for the lack of support from their compatriots and the Western nations.

It has been argued by some insightful observers that any reform in Arab countries goes hand in hand with a struggle between the religious and secular forces, so the only way to a development path in line with the national conditions for Arab countries is to seek compromise from conflicts, to hit a balance between religiousness and secularity and a balance between Islamic cultural tradition and modern social life. Only in this way, could the Arab states shatter the so-called “democracy paradox”, featured by relaxing authoritarianism but unleashing the “demon” of theocracy at the same time and thus leading democratic reforms to a non-democratic prospect. However, this would be a long and tortuous process.

III. Regional Pattern Facing New Adjustments

Though designed to promote the solidarity and cooperation between Arab countries, the League of Arab States (Arab League) responded slowly to this round of turbulence, vacillated attitudinally, and failed to come to any agreement. Especially surrounding the Libya and Syria crises, the member states

were divided on many issues, as a result, the Summit of Arab League, which was scheduled to be held in March 2011, had to be postponed to the next year. At the Summit of Arab League held in Baghdad in March 2012, countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar held hard-line stance toward the Syrian government though the summit called for politically resolving the Syrian crisis and embraced the mediation efforts by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Among the 22 member states, only ten heads of states made it to the event, and member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) just dispatched ministerial-level officials. This is the lowest-level summit held since the founding of the Arab League. Egypt, which has been holding a dominant place in the League, is playing a less important role and will not regain its influence soon due to its domestic political, economic and social problems. Besides the GCC members, other Arab countries are also busy enough with their own affairs. The Arab world as a whole has seen its cohesion weakening, its difference increasing and its role declining further in the international system.

Remarkably, however, the GCC countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are very active. Depending on their enormous financial resources and the mutual security system, they lived through the crisis by distributing employment and livelihood allowances, stabilizing domestic situations and sending troops to suppress the anti-government Shiah riot in the GCC member state Bahrain during the crisis. In the meanwhile, The GCC got involved in the crises of other Arab countries to enlarge their influence outside the GCC. For instance, the GCC was engaged several times in the mediation of the Yemen crisis and pushed for the peaceful transfer of power by Saleh. Qatar used the Al Jazeera to whip up desired public opinion and backed up the opposition forces in the turbulent countries, including offering military and economic assistance to and propping up oppositions

in Syria, and urging Bashar to step down, etc. At the summit meeting in Riyadh in May 2011, the GCC declared to accept Morocco and Jordan as its new members. The enlarged council, which includes all the monarchies in the Arab world, becomes the dominant force in the Arab world, and as a result, the gravity of the Arab world has shifted eastward.

At the same time, the three non-Arab nations in the region—Turkey, Iran and Israel—repeatedly adjusted their policies so as to take the initiative and expand their influence. Turkey is the most striking case among them. Since it came to power in 2001, Turkish Justice and Development Party has gradually changed its policy from “prioritizing Europe over Asia” into “prioritizing both Europe and Asia”. Exploiting its geopolitical significance as a country connecting the two continents, it plays a part in both ends to enlarge its influence. Turkey took advantage of the upheavals in West Asia and North Africa to strengthen its diplomatic influence in the Middle East, trying to fill up the geopolitical vacuum and play a leadership role in the region. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan indicates expressly on several occasions that Turkey will play a more active role in the globe and strive for rights, justice, freedom and democracy in the Middle East. At the beginning of the crisis, Turkey got itself involved in a high profile. The next day after the protests in Egypt, U.S. President Barack Obama communicated with Erdogan, calling on Turkey to offer all-round cooperation in stabilizing the situation soon. Enjoying special relations with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Turkish Justice and Development Party warned the Muslim Brotherhood from provoking military and state organizations and not to resort to the use of arms. The Party looks upon itself as the guardian of the Muslim Brotherhoods in the Middle Eastern countries and spreads the “Turkey Model”, which has influenced the development of situations in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria to some extent. On the issue of Libya, not only did Turkey join NATO military operations against Libya and

was among the first to recognize the Libyan National Transitional Council, Prime Minister Erdogan also visited Benghazi especially, showing his support toward the anti-Gaddafi forces. As the upheaval in Syria intensified, Turkey followed the United States and other Western nations by claiming the Bashar government as illegitimate, pressuring the Syrian authorities and supporting the opposition forces. The Syrian overseas oppositions such as the National Council were all encamped in Turkey. Turkey became the major base for the Syrian oppositions.

Iran found itself in a complex situation during the crisis. On the one hand, regional turbulence has shifted the attention of the United States and other Western nations, which benefits Iranian nuclear plans and enhances its regional impact. On the other hand, however, with the adjustment of U.S. policy toward the Middle East, the Iranian nuclear issue is highlighted and Iran is faced with harsh sanctions and war threats by the United States and other Western nations. Besides, its economy is getting worse. It is also an open question whether the Syrian Shiah Bashar regime would remain in power. All these factors will reduce Iran's strategic room for maneuver.

The increasingly turbulent regional situation, especially the rise of Islamic forces, has further worsened Israel's security conditions. Overall, Israel has adopted "strategic silence", in an attempt to check the dynamic situation with the static principle. It exploited the Gulf countries' fear of Iran by exaggerating the Iranian nuclear issue and directed the international public opinion against Iran, thus improving its unfavorable situation.

The rising influence of Turkey and Saudi Arabia has pushed the Middle Eastern region toward a multi-driver political landscape. The strong intervention by these countries has broken down the boundary between the traditional extreme and moderate countries, and has made the international relations more complex in the region. Meanwhile, stirred up by the United States and other Western nations, the Iranian nuclear issue has

replaced the Palestinian-Israeli dispute to be the main hot-spot issue in the region.

IV. America's Adjustment in its Middle East Strategy

The United States did not expect the explosion of upheavals in West Asia and North Africa. The uncertain political situation in the Middle East has put the U.S. into a dilemma, making it hesitant to act and also disrupting the Obama administration's strategic deployment in the Middle East. After almost half a year of observation and assessment, President Obama made a speech on May 19, 2011, declaring that America would adopt a package of measures to push for democratic reforms in the Middle East, and proclaiming that the Arab world was receiving a historical opportunity and that the U.S. diplomacy would open a new chapter. By analyzing this diplomatic report by Obama in association with the U.S.' diplomatic practices in the region, we can see that the U.S. has made the following adjustments to its Middle East policies.

1. Pursuing the values diplomacy

Obama promised to spread American values and democratic principles to the Middle East and determined to set Egypt and Tunisia as models of transitional democracies. Therefore, he decided to exempt Egypt of its \$1 billion debts and assist the latter in raising \$1 billion from the global capital market in credit, which is to be used for infrastructure construction and creating jobs. The United States managed to make the "Multi-national Banks" of the G8 summit commit \$20 billion of assistance for supporting the social and economic reforms in Egypt and Tunisia, so that a demonstration effect will be produced for the whole Middle Eastern region.

2. Stabilizing the Gulf countries, strengthening their military power and forming a Gulf multilateral security

alliance against Iran

The Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia are America's key allies in the Middle East as the bridgehead to contain Iran. The headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet are based in Bahrain. These countries are also the major suppliers of world crude oil, vital to the world economy. Therefore, right at the beginning of the crises, the U.S. regarded stabilizing the Gulf countries as the key link of its new Middle East strategy. Not only did it tacitly allow Saudi Arabia and other countries to send troops to suppress the Shiite mass riots in Bahrain, it also helped Saudi Arabia and other countries in their efforts to stabilize the situation and reduce the shocks from the regional crisis. In December 2011, the United States reached a deal with Saudi Arabia on selling F-15 fighters worth \$30 billion to the latter and promising to sell weapons of \$60 billion to the latter in the next decade. The Deputy Press Secretary of the White House, Joshua Earnest claimed that the deal consolidated the U.S.-Saudi relationship and demonstrated the U.S. commitment to Saudi Arabia's effort to strengthen its national defense capability, which is an element of the regional security. The deal was also related to countering the potential threat from Iran.

3. Pursuing neo-interventionism and pushing for change of anti-America regimes

Under the excuse of avoiding the killing of innocent civilians and the appearance of large-scale humanitarian disasters, the United States bombed Libya savagely and overturned the Gaddafi regime, thus creating neo-interventionism under the banner of humanitarian intervention—the Libya Model. There is commonality and difference between the Libya War and the Kosovo War. The commonality lies in the so-called “human rights above sovereignty” while the difference is that the United States joined the Libya war in a smarter way, with an obvious Obama characteristic. It replaced the unilateral action with multilateral action, stressed the importance of participation of Arab and

African countries, covered the action with a legal cloak by persuading the Security Council to pass Resolution 1973; placed Britain and France at the front as vanguards and as leaders while putting America as the backstage supporter, carried out the strategy of “playing off Libyans against Libyans” by supporting Libyan opposition forces. This type of fighting a low-cost limited war in a smart way reflected the discreet attitude of America on wars under the background of accelerated transformation of the international system and contracted U.S. financial resources.

4. Intensifying the efforts to contain Iran

The core of American Middle East strategy is to pressure Iran to drop its nuclear plan and even change the Iranian regime. After Shiites took control in Iraq, a “Shiite arc” has formed, starting from Iran, through Iraq and Syria, and ending with Lebanon. The Iran-Syria alliance not only threatens the security of U.S. strategic ally—Israel, but also makes U.S. allies in the Gulf like Saudi Arabia governed by Sunnis feel uneasy. By suppressing Syria and pressuring Bashar to step down, the United States aims to break the “Shiite arc” and further isolate Iran. In addition to such measures as diplomatic isolation, military deterrence and cyber war, the United States has implemented the harshest sanctions against Iranian oil export and financial systems. U.S.-Iranian gaming enters into a new era and Iran is confronted with more severe environment.

5. Refocusing on the Israeli-Palestinian issue

The Israeli-Palestinian issue was one of the issues that the U.S. cannot evade. Obama reiterated that America would promote Palestinian-Israeli peace, proposed to set the boundary line of 1967 as the foundation for dividing the lands between Palestine and Israel. America’s focus on the issue reflected its objective of improving its strained relations with the Islamic world, reshaping its image and safeguarding its strategic interests in the Middle East. But it has said much more than it has done.

Without adopting substantive steps, it will make little progress in breaking the deadlock of the issue.

America's adjustments in its Middle East policy are the important parts of its strategic shift from the Middle East to the Asian-Pacific region. America's high-profile claim of returning to Asia-Pacific reflects its massive strategic adjustment based on the consideration of the whole situation and the future. Looking from this perspective, America's adjustments to its Middle East policy are both measures responding to regional crises and necessary preparations and arrangements for carrying out an all-around strategic shift eastwards. In this round of crisis, the United States interfered in the internal affairs of other countries and spread the Western values of democracy and freedom, which aroused popular aversions in most Arab countries. The rulers in the Arab countries held a two-sided attitude toward the United States. They hate U.S. hegemonic conducts though they need the help of United States. It is evident that Islamic forces begin to rise in many Arab countries after this round of turmoil. Even for moderate Islamic factions, their ideology and governing philosophy are incompatible with America's Middle-East policy. Therefore, it is impossible for the governments of Arab countries to cooperate with the United States as they used to. In general, the United States will continue to hold a predominant position in the Middle East, but its influence is declining apparently.

V. China's Policy

China has enjoyed a long-term friendly relationship with the countries in West Asia and North Africa. Over the past half century, the two sides have made steady progress in the cooperation in such fields as politics, economy, culture etc. The region enjoys an important place in the whole diplomatic landscape of China. Likewise, the countries in the region generally attach great importance to developing relations with China. With China's

fast economic development and its increasingly important international position and influence, countries in the region are more earnest to improve their relations with China. Faced with the dramatic changes in the region, China observed calmly, dealt cool-headedly and adhered to the principle of non-interference in others' internal affairs and making more efforts to promote peace talks. China did so out of the following two considerations:

First, preserving regional stability fits in with the interests of the international community and the interests of regional countries and China. The populace in the region has the desire to reform and preserve their interests, which should be respected. But China opposes overthrowing the present state regime by threat of force or even by inviting outside military forces, as this is definitely not the proper way to respect and safeguard the appeals of common people. On the contrary, it has the potential to throw the whole country into a civil war, destroy the achievements of economic construction, bring more damage to people's lives and assets and also affect regional peace and stability.

Second, adhering to non-interference is the most important principle of China's diplomatic thoughts and concepts, and the basic norm governing modern international relations. Over the past half a century, China has stuck to this principle in developing its relations with the Middle Eastern countries, which earned the respect and praise from the people and countries in the region. At this critical moment of dramatic changes in the region, China should all the more adhere to this principle by clearly opposing outside intervention, respecting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state, respecting the independent choice by the people of each country. Only so can we take the initiative, create and broaden the working space for various parties and further develop out practical cooperation with each country.

Throughout the turbulence in West Asia and North Africa, China has so far played an active role and has built the image

of a responsible power. Firstly, China has proactively mitigated and stabilized the regional situation. During the political transition periods in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, China had been playing the role of promoting peace talks, pushing the stakeholders to solve disputes through dialogues and consultations, supporting the mediation efforts of the related regional organizations. When new governments were formed in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, China established contacts with them in time and offered assistance it can according to their needs, which produce good responses among the local people and governments. Secondly, China has worked hard in safeguarding basic norms of international relations and has played the role of a responsible power. When the Security Council was discussing whether to pass the Resolution of establishing no-fly zones in Libya, China honored its consistent stance of not voting yes according to the principles of respecting national sovereignty and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. Meanwhile, considering the demands of the Arab League and African Union and aiming to protect the safety of innocent civilians, China finally abstained from voting the Resolution. However, when the United States and other Western nations took advantage of the resolution to carry out large-scale air strike on Libya and made the situation more complex and grimmer, China expressed its strong opposition. At the beginning of 2012, the Syrian crisis deteriorated further. Under the excuse of avoiding humanitarian disasters, the United States and other Western nations stepped up their efforts to prop up the Syrian opposition forces and exported arms and weaponry to them, attempting to overthrow the Bashar government. On February 4, 2012, the UN Security Council held a vote on the Syrian draft resolution. Because the resolution included hidden contents of forceful change of the present Syrian government and set the stage for future military intervention, China and Russia vetoed the draft resolution. Thereafter, China raised the six-point proposal for the political resolution of the Syrian crisis and sent

special envoys and representatives of the Chinese Foreign Minister to the Middle East three times to work on Syrian government and relevant parties, to clarify China's position to the involved Arab countries, to communicate with them and to stress that China's veto reflects its neutral stand in the crisis. China has been calling for all the related parties in Syria to entirely cooperate with the mediation efforts of the Arab League and opposing any settlement by force or forceful regime change, which is inconsistent with UN Charter and principles. Under the influence of China and Russia, UN Security Council unanimously passed a presidential statement, embracing the mediation effort by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Thirdly, China focused on humanitarian issues. China has offered the first batch of humanitarian assistance worth a total of \$5 million and RMB30 million to the people in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria. It will continue to offer assistance in accordance with the actual conditions. Fourthly, China practiced the concept of "people-oriented" and "diplomacy for the people" concepts and safeguarded the interests of Chinese citizens and corporations. After the crises happened, the Chinese government used all kinds of means immediately to evacuate 2,000 and 35,860 Chinese citizens respectively from Egypt and Libya. This is the largest-scale evacuation operation since the founding of China, which reflects the advantage of the Chinese socialist system and has won the praise of the international community.

China has solid friendship and strong cooperation with countries in West Asia and North Africa. So the current upheavals in the region will not affect its traditional friendly relations with those nations. The governmental changes in the countries concerned will not change the fundamental trends of long-term cooperation between the two sides either. The situation in the region is still developing and the turbulence may persist for a long period of time. Facing the potential new conditions and new issues, China should draw on advantages and avoid disadvantages, follow the progressive trends and continue to do the work on the region in a down-to-earth way. 