

Rise of Islamist political parties in ME is temporary, says expert

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ISLAMABAD: “The honeymoon period of the Islamist political parties in the middle-east would not last long,” said Mr. Raza Naeem, Professor at Beaconhouse University Lahore, here on Wednesday. He was the main speaker at a roundtable organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) on “The Arab Spring: Hopes, Lessons, and Prospects”.

Naeem was of the view that the Arab Spring could be better compared to the 1948 uprisings of the Western Europe rather than the 1989 anti-communist uprising because of its localized dynamics and repetitive pattern. He termed the Arab Spring as a response of the power-deprived populations of middle-eastern countries towards their autocratic, and at times tyrannical, rulers that had concentrated power and wealth in a few hands. He added, however, that the dynamics of protests in each of the Arab countries where they took place were different from the other.

Naeem shared that in the countries where there were uprisings, either the rulers evolved a solution without giving their power in or called for elections that resulted in the rise of Islamist political parties, adding that the National Transition Council (NTC), which toppled Ghaddafi was also Islamist and had already announced introducing Shariah and polygamy in the country. He attributed the rise of Islamist political parties to a variety of factors, including: their grass-root networks, their social welfare contributions towards the poor, fragmentation of the secular political parties, as well as the disrepute of the secularism because of the ostensibly secular nature of the autocracies that the uprisings aimed to topple. Naeem added that the people’s inclination towards the religious parties would not last long as some of them had already failed to deliver on social services that people were hoping for.

Naeem maintained that there were prospects of the division, once again, of Yemen on the former North South lines. He did not express much hope in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) evolving into a confederation. He said that the GCC had only succeeded in its objective of protecting the Arab monarchies from the Iranian revolution of 1979 and that it never aimed at anything more than that to begin with.

Other participants of the roundtable included: Mr. Ashraf Azim, President IRS; Brig. (Retd.) Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow IRS; Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Saleem Haider; Prof. Nazir Hussain of the Department of International Relations at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU); Ms. Arshi Saleem Hashmi, Assistant Professor at National Defense University (NDU); Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst at IRS; Ms. Farhat Parveen, Research Analyst at IRS; Mr. Khalid Mehmood, Research Analyst at IRS; and other researchers from the institute.