

*Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies*

**International Seminar on**

**Rethinking West Asia**

*Moving Beyond the Revolutions*

**March 19-20, 2014**

In the 1950s and 1960s, a generation rose against the Arab governments that were perceived as functioning on behest of the colonial powers. A generation later, many of these revolutionary leaders and their inheritors had themselves become oppressors in the eyes of the people, leading them to rebel a second time. While there are misgivings about the possibility of the emergence of a truly revolutionary notion of freedom, as one explores the threats and opportunities in an ever changing political landscape, nevertheless the fourth year of the second Arab Uprisings has set forth a plethora of queries pertaining to the region. Some significant issues have been identified which remain vital to an understanding of the region in the context of the continuing developments arising out of the recent revolutions. These include revisiting approaches grounded in political economy as the means to address issues such as neoliberalism, counter-revolution, contentious politics and social movements. The relationship between approaches grounded in political economy and those grounded in what might be called discourse analysis or issues of representation; questions related to subjectivity, agency, and institutions; issues of law, war, and revolution, including questions related to human rights, international institutions and enforcement, accountability, police power, state “building” and constitutionalism are some of the other crucial areas which demand scrutiny. Consequently, a thoughtful debate on the major questions regarding how to frame the unit of analysis: “the Middle East”/”West Asia” as compared to, say, “Arab politics” or “the Islamic world,” assumes imminence and importance.

Another set of inquiries which require further discussion include the significance of construing current events through the framework of “revolution” and the debate about whether any particular set of events is “really” a revolution or not. Questions concerning state agents being replaced by other agents, in other words, an analysis or evaluation of the movements associated with a host of disparate groups/organizations that sought reform in the region. By what method the regime yields to various social forces that is, the multiple protest groups offer other important areas of analysis. Case studies for example, a discussion of Tunisia, the debates concerning Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Sudan, would offer an appraisal of the successful and not so successful models. In addition, a study of the role of regional and non-regional players that were active in the region, such as the Arab League, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United States can also enrich the deliberations by bringing into focus how they individually and collectively confronted the challenge of instability associated with the *Arab Spring* and the ever evolving *Arab Thaw*. Furthermore, critical and protracted regional complications such as a discussion of Palestine and the use of intellectual and political paradigms of analysis such as settler colonialism may add another facet to the existing corpus of understanding. Moreover, the recent events involving Iran, in the wake of the nuclear deal has incorporated one more fascinating aspect to the study of the region which deserves a greater degree of exploration.

Keeping in mind the significance of these issues, there remains the necessity to engage with some of the underlined concerns in the process laying the foundations for elaborating, critiquing and apprehending these agendas. The themes that the proposed seminar intends to explore include:

1. Reviewing the regional uprisings in West Asia.
2. Reassessing the history of the region in the wake of the Arab uprisings—of shifting balances and emerging scenarios.
3. Deconstructing Arab nationalism & challenging dominant narratives.
4. Re-examining the state of the Arab state & authoritarian state formation.
5. Democracy and its confines in West Asia.
6. Citizenship in a digital state.
7. The “exceptionalisation” of Law; Power and Inequality in West Asia.
8. Islam in the light of the Revolution; Political Islam after “Post-Islamism”
9. The space for Palestine in the new discourse & the “Iran Question.”
10. The role of and resistance to local, regional and external forces.

The travel costs (economy class airfare) of the participants will be covered by the organisers. The Institute will be providing local hospitality for the duration of the conference. The proceedings of the conference will be published as a book. Participants are requested to respond at the earliest with a title, 500 words abstract and a brief one page CV to

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