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## India's Dilemma in the Arab Spring

*Bülent ARAS, Elif Gizem DEMİRAĞ, Mona SACHTER*



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## **Abstract:**

*How can India's reactions to the Arab Spring be explained? Why did India react differently to the Libyan and Syrian cases? How do India's responses justify its aspiration to take an active role in an emerging multilateral international order? This paper attempts to answer these questions by analyzing India's major interests in the MENA region. India's voting behavior vis-à-vis the UN resolutions during its Security Council tenure offers a critical empirical baseline supporting this analysis. The paper highlights that India's traditional foreign policy based on the non-alignment and non-interventionist principles have been driven by its economy, energy and diaspora-related interests towards the MENA region. The Arab Spring created a dilemma for India in its foreign policy making and a partial deviation from the traditional foreign policy approach, especially in multilateral platforms. Despite these challenges, this paper argues that India successfully resisted the wave of the Arab Spring.*

## **Introduction**

The Indian Republic has undergone dramatic changes during the past two decades. The country has developed into a rising economic power and an aspiring global player since Manmohan Singh's, the Finance Minister at the time, liberalization agenda in the early 1990s. India has the third biggest economy in terms of purchasing power parity and is en route to overtake China as the most populous country. In line with its economic development, India has sought increasing leverage in the international sphere and is part of the G20, the BRICS, and the G7+5. Furthermore, India has been seeking a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) through the G4.

The last days of 2010 witnessed a series of public uprisings that erupted in Tunisia shortly after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi and quickly spilled over to other MENA countries. The demonstrations spreading from Sidi Bouzid to Tunis acted as a catalyst for similar protests in other Arab countries, shaking the Arab world from Libya to Syria. Protests in Bahrain and Kuwait, the fall of long-standing rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, as well as the developing civil wars in Syria and Libya dominated international headlines and political agendas for years to come. During the spring of 2011, the topic began to penetrate Indian public discourse, academic circles, and think tanks. The audience both inside and out of India expected

a decisive response from India, particularly since the country occupied a non-permanent seat in the UNSC from 2011 to 2012.

While Western powers were quick to side with the public, India as the most populous democracy and as an ambitious power was cautious to react.<sup>1</sup> Scholars such as Satish Chandra and Sushant Sareen severely criticize what they perceived as an "inexplicable" and "deafening" silence.<sup>2</sup> Because of India's vital interests in the region, they argue the necessity for India to clearly state its "policy and position on the events sweeping through the Arab world."<sup>3</sup>

A closer look at India's reactions to the Arab uprisings reveals curious variations in India's overall engagement pattern with several "Arab Spring" countries. While India stayed on the sidelines during the most critical moments of the Arab uprisings, it found itself in a position to react to the situation in Libya and Syria, which were both on the agenda of high priority in the UNSC during India's tenure. India's inconsistent record of voting was found to be "indecisive"<sup>4</sup> by both domestic and Western voices.

In spite of this apparent dichotomy in reaction between Indian leadership and domestic and international public opinion, little scholarly attention has been paid to the analysis of India's response to the Arab uprisings. In

light of the geographical significance of the Arab Spring to India in West Asia, this article's main objective is to fill this vacuum by exploring India's foreign policy response to the Arab Spring. It evaluates the change and continuity in Indian foreign policy toward West Asia with respect to the challenges of the Arab Spring. The changing geopolitical landscape results in a rethinking and recalibration of the policies of regional and international actors toward the new Arab political geography. The response of Indian policy makers to the Arab Spring will be analyzed by paying special attention to the extent in which the changing political situation led them to deviate from a traditional non-interventionist policy. Consequently, shedding light on the following three consecutive questions is imperative. First, how can India's reactions be explained? Second, why do the Libyan and Syrian cases differ from all others? Third, how do they fit with India's aspirations to take an active role in emerging multilateral international order?

### India's Interests in the MENA Region

Using the strategy of nonalignment as a tool, India's silent stance in the Arab Spring was motivated by securing its economic and geopolitical interests and ensuring the safety of the Indian Diaspora in those regions. However, this lethargic attitude stirred a number of reactions both domestically and internationally, particularly among those who pursue interventionist policies. A number of speculations over India's rationale appear to associate the country's non-assertive stance with its desire to maintain stable relations with countries in West Asia and other global players. These relations are mainly built on India's political, economic, and energy security interests. In contrast to criticism from other parts of the world, India has so far successfully performed protectionist policies in the spheres deemed critical for its survival. For this reason, India has abandoned protectionism and pursued economic liberalization.<sup>5</sup> Overall, taking a closer look at Indian interests in West Asia can highlight Indian reactions toward the Arab Spring.

India had never been a global economic power until the 1990s. However, in the late 1990s, the shift in mindset among Indian policy makers toward economic liberalization largely influenced the reputation of the country. It is argued that there are two significant reasons behind this shift. First, India needed to establish strong economic ties with other countries in order to import goods that they themselves were unable to

produce. India mainly imported goods such as military hardware or oil for the purpose of ensuring national and economic survival.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, India underlined that political and diplomatic opportunities with global players and regional actors can improve trade relations with those countries.<sup>7</sup>

The transition from a closed to an open economy by eliminating trade barriers and producing trade reforms resulted in a dramatic increase in India's trade volume. In 2009, India's trade volume in reports on the largest economies in the world published by the International Monetary Fund, United Nations and World Bank.<sup>8</sup> In 2013, India's GDP was approximately \$1.87 trillion (GDP current \$US).<sup>9</sup> India's grouping with the powerful BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) block also fostered its economic cooperation with the other affluent members of this rising community. According to the Indian Department of Commerce, China is India's largest trading partner among the BRIC countries with a total trade of 65,8 billion dollars.<sup>10</sup>

For India, the most important trade partners have been with countries in the Middle East, particularly the Gulf States. There has been remarkable growth in trade relations and economic cooperation with those countries especially after the Cold War in comparison to their relations until 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Table 1 shows that the rate of India's exports and imports with West Asia and GCC countries has been stable in the last four years.

| Years        | 2010-2011  | 2011-2012  | 2012-2013  | 2013-2014  | 2014-2015<br>(Apr-Oct) |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------------|
| Import Total | 99,722.05  | 140,179.50 | 143,302.06 | 134,445.78 | 74,344.54              |
| Export Total | 50,236.15  | 54,896.16  | 62,409.71  | 61,288.01  | 37,711.52              |
| Total Trade  | 149,958.20 | 195,075.66 | 205,711.77 | 195,733.79 | 112,056.06             |

Table 1: India's Total Import-Export Rate with West Asia-GCC:

1. The values are in US\$ dollar million.
2. West Asia and GCC countries for Government of India's data includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.
3. The data was taken from the Government of India, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Department of Commerce.

Despite the fact that India altered its protectionist position in the economic sphere based on the non-aligned movement, the country always avoided taking

sides in regional or international conflicts. India was able to achieve good political and economic relations with certain countries by avoiding taking sides in regional disputes. Therefore, it can be said that India's reticence was strategically used as a tool to ensure stable economic relations with each actor in the region. In the instance of Iran and Saudi Arabia, India has positive ties with both and avoids taking sides in the conflict. In other words, up until today, India has acted in a strategic way to protect the balance in its relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia. In the Non Alignment 2.0, scholars also emphasize the importance of maintaining a strategic engagement with West Asia, particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia. Khilnani et al. express that:

"The other key principle that should guide our strategic engagement with West Asia is the avoidance of sharp choices. In particular, we should try and steer clear of the escalating rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We have major interests in our relationships with both these countries, and need to strike a careful balance in our dealings with each. The acquisition of overt nuclear weapons capability by Iran is undesirable. An additional nuclear weapons state in our strategic neighborhood will make regional stability more precarious."<sup>12</sup>

Relations between India and Saudi Arabia have shown remarkable growth in the last decade.<sup>13</sup> Saudi Arabia is one of India's largest trade partners with a total trade at \$48,6 billion during 2013-2014.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, as Table 2 shows that Saudi Arabia hosted a number of Indians with a population of 1.7 million in 2012. Most have migrated to Saudi Arabia to work in sectors such as infrastructure, education and health.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, thanks to its progressive relations with Saudi Arabia, India has an open access to the Caspian Sea and Afghanistan. India also enjoys solid economic, energy, and geopolitical ties with Iran. Iran is India's second largest energy supplier.<sup>16</sup>

A few scholars, however, argue that India should heed caution in the post-Arab Spring environment where conflicting interests and religious tensions have escalated to a great extent. For instance, Mukherjee argues that "India needs to play her cards carefully, especially after the Arab Spring, when the divide between the Sunni Saudi Arabia and the Shia Iran is accentuating and Saudi Arabia fears that Iran might meddle and disturb other Sunni Arab regimes in the region, such as Bahrain."<sup>17</sup>

India also has a strong interest in securing its relations

with its energy suppliers. Given India's population, the country is dependent on other countries as its domestic energy supply is very limited while it demands about 3.5 million barrels of oil per day.<sup>18</sup> India places emphasis on having sufficient energy sources in order to improve the economic and military capacity.<sup>19</sup> Problems in the Middle East forced India to reevaluate its position in this new challenging environment. There is a debate about to what extent relations between India and Iran can be effective. Although Iran is one of the most important energy partners for India, this partnership puts India's stable relations with the US and Israel at risk. Therefore, this highlights the need for New Delhi to maintain a balance in its relations to crucial actors.

How is India's relation with the countries that experienced uprisings? India was one of the few countries that successfully achieved to steer its relations clear of this difficult environment of intense civil conflicts and protests in the Arab world. During the Arab Spring, Indian foreign policy makers sought to follow a non-interventionist policy. In fact, India's stance during the Arab Spring was very much motivated by securing its economic and political interests and ensuring the safety of Indian diaspora in those regions. According to numbers provided by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (Table 2), the Indian diaspora in the MENA region reached 6 million in 2012. According to the World Bank, the remitted money from Indian diasporas in Gulf countries was around "\$64 billion during 2011-2012".<sup>20</sup>

When the Arab Spring started in Tunisia, one of New Delhi's top priorities was securing the welfare of the Indian diaspora in that region.<sup>21</sup> Although India did not react to first uprisings in Tunisia, the official position changed when conflicts spilled to Egypt and other countries. While the Indian diaspora in Tunisia numbered at 199, there were over 3,600 Indians in Egypt (Table 2).

## India's Response to the Arab Spring

### Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen

Caution and self-interest have been the primary tenets of India's foreign policy since the Cold War. Strictly adhering to the principle of non-interference, India acted as a rational player while looking after its core interests in the MENA region. How were these ideas reflected in New Delhi's bilateral reactions to the Arab uprisings?

| No. | Country | Overseas Indians Living Abroad | No. | Country              | Overseas Indians Living Abroad |
|-----|---------|--------------------------------|-----|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1.  | Algeria | 450                            | 10. | Libya                | 15000                          |
| 2.  | Bahrain | 350000                         | 11. | Morocco              | 300                            |
| 3.  | Egypt   | 3600                           | 12. | Oman                 | 718642                         |
| 4.  | Iran    | 4200                           | 13. | Qatar                | 500000                         |
| 5.  | Iraq    | 9000                           | 14. | Saudi Arabia         | 1789000                        |
| 6.  | Israel  | 78000                          | 15. | Syria                | 650                            |
| 7.  | Jordan  | 7000                           | 16. | Tunisia              | 199                            |
| 8.  | Kuwait  | 579390                         | 17. | United Arab Emirates | 1750000                        |
| 9.  | Lebanon | 10000                          | 18. | Yemen                | 111000                         |

**Table 2: Overseas Indians Living West Asia (as on May 2012)**

**Source:** The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs

In line with its traditional non-interference principle, India's general reaction to the Arab Spring was also dominated by caution and restraint. India only reacted to five out of all the public uprisings that occurred during the Arab Spring through its main foreign policy institution, the Ministry of External Affairs. The Indian government refrained from releasing a response in countries it did not perceive as posing a threat to its core interests. New Delhi did not immediately react to the popular upheavals in some of the Arab countries; it rather waited for some time to formulate an official reaction to the emerging situations in Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and Libya.<sup>22</sup>

However, a distinction needs to be made between Libya and Syria and all other countries in the Arab Spring. The former two were subject to scrutiny in the UNSC, where India held a non-permanent seat between 2011 and 2012. International deliberations on Syria and Libya forced New Delhi to adopt a slightly different strategy than in the past. Before discussing India's reaction to situations in Syria and Libya, we will examine its response to the uprisings in other countries.

The Indian government did not officially issue a statement when protests broke out in Tunisia in December 2010. Its first reaction to the Arab uprisings came with the Egyptian protests. On January 29, 2011, twelve days after an Egyptian man set himself on fire

in front of the Egyptian parliament<sup>23</sup> and four days after large-scale protests erupted, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a travel advisory for Indian citizens. The statement assured the safety of the Indian diaspora in Egypt and set the wheels in motion for establishing a crisis desk for the diaspora in Cairo.<sup>24</sup> Put differently, the safety of the 3,600 Indians living in Egypt triggered the first Indian reaction. Because only approximately 200 Indians lived in Tunisia and no significant trade or energy relations were at stake, the Indian government had no incentive to get involved. The safety of Indian citizens abroad was the main topic of most of the official statements.

India first commented on the political situation in Egypt on the day a special Air India flight from Cairo had been completed.<sup>25</sup> India refrained from siding with the protestors. Instead, it called for "strength and stability," "prosperity for the region," and reiterated the "friendly ties" between the Indian and Egyptian people.<sup>26</sup> The Indian government thereby highlighted its preference for stability in Egypt, which secures the safety of its diaspora, remittances, and economic investments, as well as in the region, which is vital importance for energy supply.

In refraining from supporting either side, New Delhi sought to ensure good ties with both the people and the governments and institutions that are related to its interests. Thus, no matter the outcome, India could pursue its positive relations with Egypt after the protests. By remaining cautious, India aimed to create a win-win situation during this highly unstable period in Egypt. When Mubarak stepped down, India remained discreet in its reaction. While welcoming the decision, the Ministry of External Affairs again emphasized the friendly ties as well as its preference for stability, peace, and prosperity.<sup>27</sup>

As previously discussed, New Delhi's reaction to the public uprisings in the Gulf States was influenced by the political and sectarian divide between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both are vital economic partners and India heavily depends on energy and trade with them and their respective spheres of influence. Hence, it is of utmost importance for India to steer clear of any involvement in this rivalry.

In this regard, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs reacted cautiously to the situation in Bahrain and Yemen, considering a clear Sunni-Shiite component in

both of them. The official stance, however, was clearly only directed at the 350,000 Indians living in Bahrain and the 111,000 living in Yemen. Instead of commenting on the political situation, once again the statement only touches upon the safety of Indian nationals. In spite of formally rejecting any kind of forceful intervention in the affairs of another country, the Indian government did not comment on the Saudi intervention in Bahrain. In fact, the Bahraini Foreign Minister was invited to visit India nearly two weeks after the involvement.<sup>28</sup> During the opening remarks of the meeting with the Bahraini Foreign Minister, the protests or intervention were not even mentioned.

While the Indian government advised its Indian citizens to leave Yemen and offered assistance with homecoming, there was little demand from the Indian diaspora in this country. However, according to the Indian government, “In the last few days, only a handful of Indian nationals have sought assistance, from the Embassy of India, Sana’a, for travelling back to India.”<sup>29</sup> The operation ended in June 2011, with more than 10,000 Indians remaining in the country.

While one can analyze the responses where they exist, one can only speculate as to why the Indian government did not react to the other protests. Aside from the Iran-Saudi divide and the general reluctance to involve itself in the internal matters of other states, there are two other reasons account for the lack of reaction. First, in countries such as Oman, that contains a large Indian community, protests were not strong enough to necessitate an official reaction. Second, the Indian economy’s capacity to reintegrate hundred thousand or even millions of returnees in the case of evacuation remains doubtful. Hence, instead of recognizing protests and possibly carrying the responsibility to evacuate, the Ministry of External Affairs chose not to react to protests in Kuwait altogether. Refraining from any political statements, the Indian government followed its tradition of non-interference and pursued its material interests in the region.

### A Curious Turn of Events: An Unfathomed Indian Interest in Syria and Libya

The uprisings took a somewhat more violent turn in Libya and Syria. Soon, they took the center stage in international discussions and media attention. Given the war-like situation in these countries, the UNSC took their cases more seriously than the other countries ravaged by protests. When India was part of the UNSC

between 2011 and 2012, it completed a total of eleven resolutions regarding these two countries. The Libyan and Syrian cases differed from all the other countries affected by the Arab uprisings in not only the number of resolutions passed but also in the content of the resolutions. Assets were frozen, sanctions issued, and a no-fly zone was implemented.

As a non-permanent member, India was required to partake in the discussions leading up to those resolutions. As Table 3 shows, India’s voting behavior fluctuated from resolution to resolution. The strictly self-centered and non-interventionist strategy India employed in Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen would have translated into abstaining on all of those decisions. While it was able to pursue its pragmatic, non-interventionist agenda through its bilateral statements, India was apparently hindered from pursuing this strategy by its position in the UNSC. The following discusses India’s reactions to the Libyan and Syrian cases separately, attempting to explain why they diverge from other responses observed.

### The Case of Libya

India’s reaction toward Libya regarding the UN resolutions has been exemplary in terms of the dilemma it faces in the course of Arab Spring. In March 2011, in adapting Resolution 1973, the UNSC offered to increase sanctions on Libya which suggested “no-fly zone over Libya, authorized all necessary means to

| Libya                     | Content of Resolution  | India’s Voting Behavior             |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Resolution 1970           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Referred Gadhafi to ICC</li> <li>International sanctions</li> <li>Arms embargo</li> </ul>   | In favor                            |
| Resolution 1973           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authorized military intervention in Libya in form of no-fly zone</li> <li>Panel to monitor embargo</li> </ul>   | Abstained                           |
| Resolution 2009           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decided on United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)</li> <li>Accepted “new” Libyan government</li> <li>Allowed transfer of weapons to new government</li> </ul> | In favor                            |
| Resolution 2016           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set termination date for Resolution 1973</li> </ul>   | In favor                            |
| Resolution 2017           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stipulated prevention of proliferation of portable surface-to-air missiles, chemical weapons stockpiles and other small arms</li> </ul>                                 | In favor                            |
| Resolution 2022           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extended UNSMIL mission</li> </ul>  | In favor                            |
| Resolution 2040           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stipulated modification of arms embargo</li> </ul>  | In favor                            |
| <b>Syria</b>              |  |                                     |
| Draft Resolution 2011/612 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Condemned Syrian crackdown on protestors</li> </ul>   | Abstained [China and Russia vetoed] |
| Draft Resolution 2012/77  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Condemning violence of Syrian regime</li> </ul>   | In favor [China and Russia vetoed]  |
| Resolution 2042           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authorized military observers to Syria</li> </ul>   | In favor                            |
| Resolution 2043           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established UNSMIS</li> </ul>   | In favor                            |

Table 3: UNSC Resolutions on Libya and Syria

Source: UNSC Resolutions, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/>

protect civilians by excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory.”<sup>30</sup>

The resolution was approved by 10 votes including that of the United States, the UK, France, and Lebanon. While there was no opposite vote, India, Russia, China, Germany, and Brazil abstained. It has been claimed that before the resolution was put on the table, the United States and its allies UK and Germany engaged in several lobbying activities to build a consensus on the no-fly-zone.<sup>31</sup> The media claimed that in spite of the alleged pressure from the US, India chose to abstain.<sup>32</sup>

Manjeev Singh Puri explained the reasons behind India abstaining from the vote. India would avoid making a decision regarding the resolution, since the UNSC did not receive the report in time to vote on the resolution. Furthermore, Puri stated that:

“The report of that Envoy and that of others had not yet been received. As a consequence, today’s resolution was based on very little clear information, including a lack of certainty regarding who was going to enforce the measures. There must be certainty that negative outcomes were not likely before such wide-ranging measures were adopted. Political efforts must be the priority in resolving the situation.”<sup>33</sup>

India’s decision regarding the resolution about the no fly-zone over Libya can be considered as a rational decision. Considering the Indian interests especially with regard to the BRICS countries, it is no coincidence that India abstained from the vote and sided with Brazil, Russia, and China. India’s decision indicated that the country did not act against the support of UNSC but rather against third party involvement which can block the “territorial integrity, sovereignty and unity of Libya.”<sup>34</sup> As indicated by Puri in the following year of Libyan uprising in the UNSC. The meeting on the Libyan case in the International Criminal Court in November 2012 revealed the following:

“The international community, including the Security Council and the ICC, should fully assist the Libyan authorities in this process. This inclusive approach to national reconciliation, anchored in state sovereignty, is the only way to overcome the problems that Libya is presently facing...It is also important to ensure that all actions by the ICC Prosecutor should fall strictly within the ambit of Resolution 1970.”<sup>35</sup>

India’s vote regarding the UN decisions on Libya was supportive of the UN endorsed action. The overall situation can be considered India’s dilemma faced in multilateral forums against its traditional policy line.

### The Case of Syria

In 2011, when the UNSC offered to put sanctions on Syria, India abstained along with Brazil, South Africa, and Lebanon.<sup>36</sup> The resolution was blocked when Russia and China vetoed it. The Indian representative expressed that rather than taking part in an escalating crisis, India had been engaging in bilateral dialogue with Syria through collaborative and constructive ways. India also suggested that the international community give the Syrian government some time to develop political reforms. In addition, Hardeep Puri, India’s permanent representative to the United Nations, stated that:

“The resolution under the Council’s consideration does not accommodate our concern about the threat of sanctions. It does not condemn the violence perpetrated by the Syrian opposition. Nor does it place any responsibility on the opposition to abjure violence and engage with the Syrian authorities for redressal of their grievances through a peaceful political process. We have, therefore, abstained on the resolution.”<sup>37</sup>

India’s 2011 decision was very much influenced by the country’s strategy of not become directly involved in the conflicts. India’s policy line is to preserve a longer-term engagement with the situation and support stabilization in a gradual manner.

However, the Indian approach towards the Syria conflict shifted in 2012. In February 2012, the United States, the U.K., and France as the permanent members of the UNSC proposed a second resolution, which would introduce sanctions against the Syrian regime unless Assad ceased targeting the civilians in his country.<sup>38</sup> The Russian and Chinese vetoes were far from a surprise; however, India’s affirmative vote for

***India’s policy line is to preserve a longer-term engagement with the situation and support stabilization in a gradual manner.***

the resolution was nothing short of extraordinary. Puri explained that the decision was made with the aim of “facilitating the united actions” by the UNSC and the UN Special Envoy to Syria. In contrast to the speech given in 2011, Puri stated that:

“We voted in favour of the resolution today to facilitate a united action by the Security Council in support of the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy. In our view, it would have been preferable for the Council members to show flexibility so that a united message could be conveyed to all sides to the Syrian crisis instead of pursuance of domestic interests. It is, therefore, regrettable that the Council has not been able to adopt the resolution today and send a joint message that was sought by Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan”.<sup>39</sup>

India’s position towards Syria in the UNSC is a reflection of the dilemma it faces in multilateral venues to preserve its traditional policy line. The Libyan case was a learning process, causing India to be more cautious in its voting patterns on Syria. However, India followed its concerns over non-intervention and opposition to external involvement to the possible extent during its UNSC tenure.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we attempted to discover India’s position toward the Arab Spring. The challenging environment of the Arab Spring created instability in the region, which put India’s interests at risk. However, considering the stability in total trade rates of India with West Asia, India achieved to maintain its economic interests stable during the Arab Spring. Additionally, India’s foreign policy based on balancing politics between critical actors proved effective to a considerable level. One challenge to India has been to preserve a balance between Saudi Arabia and Iran in order to protect energy and economic relations in bilateral relations, and keep itself away from potential traps of the escalating rivalry between these states in India’s relations with the Gulf countries and beyond.

Regarding the diaspora issue, India employed a low-key policy of taking care of their basic security requirements and used diplomatic channels to ask for the return of its citizens if necessary. India’s partial deviation from its non-interventionist path in Syria and Libya cases is due to its non-permanent tenure in the UNSC during the height of the Arab Spring. India’s approach is a mixture of pragmatic and nationalist outlooks of foreign

policy, which succeeded to defend India’s priorities to a considerable extent.

However, we realized that the Arab Spring brought to the forefront a dilemma in Indian foreign policy, which struggles to reconcile regional and multilateral affairs in an era of global turmoil. India attempted to pursue effective bilateral relations towards the Arab Spring in an ambiguous multidimensional framework. It avoided taking bold positions in the struggles within the Arab countries. This approach is closely related to foreign policy strategies which favor non-alignment and non-interventionism. There is a clear shift to West Asia in Indian foreign policy regarding sizeable economic and substantial security interests. The political transformation and failure of the regional order forced Indian policy makers to reconsider their policies. They faced a situation of securing their interests through employing their non-interventionist policy line in bilateral and regional platforms, while finding themselves making a decision on these issues in multilateral platforms.

Our paper suggests that India’s choice is to follow the pragmatic non-interventionist policy line with an effective and multidimensional policy framework as a continuation of emerging West Asian policy. The problem is the international and, to a lesser extent internal, pressure India feels as the most populated democracy in taking a position in popular struggles against authoritarian rulers. India’s 2011-12 tenure at the UNSC as a non-permanent member made its attitude more visible which further complicated the situation for Indian policy makers. India avoided multilateral and domestic pressures and adopted a self-centered non-interventionist policy toward the Arab Spring. However, India’s current West Asia policy does not mean it overcomes the dilemma between traditional policy line and India’s search for a role in multilateral international system. Although the Indian dilemma goes beyond the Arab Spring, one would assume that India would face the necessity to bridge the gap between traditional preferences and the emerging situation in the West Asia region.

### Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Adith Charlie, "Decoding India's Response to the Arab Spring," *Turkish Weekly*, January 25, 2013, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/op-ed/3071/decoding-india-s-response-to-the-arab-spring.html>.

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<sup>6</sup> Gil Feiler, "India's Economic Relations with Israel and the Arab Spring," *The Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies Bar-Ilan University: Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, No. 96, July 2012, <http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/MSPS96.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The World Bank Data, 2013. <http://data.worldbank.org/country/india>

<sup>10</sup> Data received from Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department of Commerce, December 4, 2014, <http://www.commerce.nic.in/eidb/Default.asp>.

<sup>11</sup> Kumaraswamy, "Reading the Silence;" "Too guarded," *The Indian Express*, February 17, 2011, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/too-guarded/751200/>.

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***“We seek to promote democratic values and humane forms of governance that are sensitive to individual and collective human rights.”***

*About the Authors:*

*Bülent Aras is academic coordinator of the Project on the Middle East and the Arab Spring (POMEAS). He is professor of international relations at Sabancı University and global fellow at Wilson Center. Aras was chairman of the Center for Strategic Research (SAM) and the Diplomatic Academy at Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs between 2010 and 2013. He was Senior Visiting Professor of Turkish Studies at St. Anthony’s College, University of Oxford in 2010.*

*Elif Gizem Demirağ is Research Assistant at POMEAS. She is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution Program at Sabancı University. She is also Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at her current university. She received her BA degree in Political Science and International Relations at Middle East Technical University Northern Cyprus Campus.*

*Mona Sachter is Trainee at Economic and Trade Section at European External Action Service. She was a Research Intern at Istanbul Policy Center in 2014. She received her BA degree in European Studies at Maastricht University.*

*About POMEAS:*

*Project on the Middle East and the Arab Spring (POMEAS) arose in response to the upheavals that started in 2011 across the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the subsequent developments of an unfolding regional process that mixed disappointments with opportunities. Building on the idea that the processes of academic inquiry, debate and public discussion can contribute to the emergence of a democratic political culture, it aims to initiate a forum open and accessible to people throughout the Middle East and beyond. POMEAS seeks to have impacts on both the discourse of experts and the climate of public opinion.*

Email : [pomeasproject@pomeas.org](mailto:pomeasproject@pomeas.org)

Phone : +90 212 292 4939

Fax : +90 212 292 4957

Location: POMEAS Project IPC Downtown Office

Bankalar Caddesi, No: 2 Sabancı University Karaköy Minerva Han 34420 Karaköy / Istanbul – TURKEY

Website: [www.pomeas.org](http://www.pomeas.org)