

# Butterfly Effect of the Arab Spring

By Melaku Muluaem

There are many theories that have been developed by great thinkers in various fields of study. One of them is "Chaos Theory", used in such fields as mathematics, physics, meteorology, and engineering.

The root of this theory is the hypothesis presented in 1972 by Edward Lorenz, an American meteorologist, in New York, entitled, "Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?"

In his presentation he said, "A butterfly could flap its wings and set molecules of air in motion, which would move other molecules of air, in turn moving more molecules of air - eventually capable of starting a hurricane on the other side of the planet." The main idea was to show how a very small action can generate dramatic and complex consequences.

In this article I would like to associate this concept with the Arab Spring and its consequences. As it is well-known, the Arab Spring started in Tunisia and spread to many other Middle Eastern and North African countries, the revolutionary wave touching many in the world. In one way or another it has affected Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Jordan and Kuwait among others, the deposing of Tunisian and Egyptian leaders. In its extreme case it led to the death of President M. Gaddafi.

According to this theory, the location of the butterfly was in Tunisia, from where revolutionary ideas and movements started to spread. Thus the butterfly started flapping its wings on December 17, 2010, in Tunisia, and subsequently the government there was overthrown on January 14, 2011.

The success of revolutionary youths in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya has become a great concern for other Arab countries. The impact of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, in flaring up the Arab Spring remains significant. In my opinion, in the Butterfly Effect concept, the 'butterfly' is the youth, and the 'molecules of air in motion' is social media, transmitting revolutionary ideas, and the 'tornado or hurricane' is the revolution.

The Arab Spring is not yet over, with Syrian youths struggling to oust their leader as other countries have done in North Africa. The main objectives of the uprisings are to establish democratic governments and conduct economic reforms. In order to control such revolutionary movements many governments responded by using force, in some cases hiring foreign mercenary armies to gun down the revolutionaries. These movements have led to the death of many people and the destruction of both national

and individual property.

The revolution has alerted other Arab countries to take their own measures. For instance, in 2011 the Saudi government began spending USD 130 billion to pump up civil servant salaries (paying two extra months), promising to build 500,000 additional units of low-income housing, and substantially increasing its financial support for religious organizations.

Similarly, the government of Kuwait has “increased civil servant salaries by 115 percent, at a cost of more than US one billion, and given a cash handout of Kuwaiti Dinar (KD) 1000 to its citizens, while promising free distribution of foodstuffs for fourteen months, at an additional cost of US five billion”. Other Arab countries have also given concessions to their people so as to neutralize the wave of revolution in the region. The fact of the matter is that people wanted to change the regime, but the regime also wanted to change the people.

Recently Saudi Arabia started expelling illegal migrant workers, with the BBC reporting that about one million illegal Bangladeshis, Indians, Filipinos, Nepalese, Pakistanis and Yemenis have left the country in the past three months. According to various sources, the main reason for this is to give wider job opportunities to its citizens, so that the youths would not follow the example set by the Arab Spring movement. In turn this measure would increase the lifespan of the monarchical rule in Saudi Arabia.

From this measure it is clear that foreigners have become scapegoats for the domestic problems of the country. One can also argue that other Arab countries will follow in the footsteps of the government of Saudi Arabia in protecting uprisings in their countries. If this happened many illegal migrant workers would suffer, and it would be a great challenge to many African and Asian countries.

In my opinion it is preferable to conduct political and economic reform rather than make foreigners the scapegoat for domestic problems. Chasing out foreigners is a “political painkiller” for a shakable government. It can give temporary relief, but it can’t alleviate the long-term social, economic and political problems.

Violations of human rights are clearly being seen in the expulsion of foreigners from Saudi Arabia, while citizens from many countries, including Ethiopia, have been shot and killed or are suffering in Saudi prisons. The returnees have also lost money and property while they were in custody.

In response to the measures of the Saudi administration, the Ethiopian government has

transported its citizens from Saudi Arabia. Tedros Adhanom (Ph.D.), the Ethiopian minister of Foreign Affairs, has asked “the Saudi Arabian authorities to investigate the killings and the ill-treatment of Ethiopians”.

In a press conference, the minister also said that an equivalent measure will be taken by the Ethiopian government. Even if he did not mention what kind of measure would be taken, it is clear that it would not abuse the human rights of Saudi citizens who live here. Rather, Ethiopia would rectify the abuse on its citizens based on international laws and norms.

In addition to the spread of the Arab Spring, the Butterfly Effect concept is helpful in describing phenomena such as the spread of socialist ideology in the 20th century, international terrorism, and religious fundamentalism. When looking at such issues it is good to first identify the location of the butterfly, then move on to the network and social fabric. This would help in controlling unexpected tornadoes or chaos in a country.

In order to reaffirm the above points, at the time of the spread of socialist ideology the location of the butterfly was in the Soviet Union. The flap of the butterfly led to many revolutionary uprisings in the world, and people in different countries overthrew their governments, establishing socialist ideology-led regimes. Regarding international terrorism, the butterfly is flapping from Al Qaeda and its direct or indirect affiliated groups. Such terrorists have their own secret network and communication in taking and executing missions. The tornado of the international terrorist is the killing of non-combatants in different corners of the world.

Melaku Muluaem is head of the training department at the Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development (EIIPD). He can be reached at [melakumulu@yahoo.com](mailto:melakumulu@yahoo.com). This email address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it. .

You can also read it on allAfrica.com <http://allafrica.com/stories/201312020521.html?viewall=1>

Reporter Newspaper <http://www.thereporterethiopia.com/index.php/opinion/commentary/item/1299-butterfly-effect-of-the-arab-spring>