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## **Emerging Trends in West Asia: Regional and Global Implications**

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Hon'ble Raksha Mantri, President of the IDSA,  
Members of the Executive Council,  
Distinguished participants,  
Members of the Strategic Community,  
IDSA Colleagues,  
Members of the Media,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished members of the audience,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I extend heartiest greetings to the participants of the 15th Asian Security Conference at the IDSA.

We are grateful to the Hon'ble Raksha Mantri and the President of the Executive Council of the IDSA, Shri A K Antony, for agreeing to deliver the key note address. His support and encouragement to the IDSA has been invaluable for us.

This conference is being held at a time of transition in West Asia. The old order is giving way slowly to the new one. Popular protests that began in Dec 2010 in Tunisia spread to several other

countries in the region, bringing in hope of reform & change. However, two years down, the promise of 'Spring' in the West Asia North Africa (WANA) region has given rise to forecasts of long 'winter' and more 'turmoil'. Regimes and governments have changed in a few countries, while in others, reforms are on hold; and in some, a few adjustments to the political systems have been made. Overall, this is a period of transition and uncertainty.

**Islamist Forces:** The political vacuum created by the passing away of old regimes is being filled up by new forces. In many countries Islamist forces with Islamist agendas are resurgent. We can expect new domestic and foreign policy agendas being unfolded in these countries.

**Violence:** One striking feature of the transition has been the widespread violence. Syria is in the middle of a civil war with no end in sight. More than sixty thousand people have reportedly been killed. Libya has seen a bloody end to the earlier regime. Protests in Egypt are continuing despite the ushering in of new political dispensation. In Tunisia, the security situation has become tense after the recent assassination of an opposition leader. There is no consensus as yet on the national dialogue in Yemen. It is becoming clear that the so called Arab Spring has not yet run its full course. The danger of violence remains stark.

**MEPP:** Domestic changes have led to exacerbation of existing faultiness. The Middle East Peace Process has been stalled. Tensions between Israel and the Hamas are rising dangerously. A new round of violence has begun as reflected in the recent round of conflict between Israel and the Hamas.

**Sectarian fault-line:** The region has long standing sectarian fault line which has been exposed during the Arab uprisings. Sectarian tensions in the region can also rise. If these tensions go out of control, the region could suffer grievously.

**Security Situation:** This transition is taking place in the backdrop of global economic crisis, sharp decline in economic growth and rise in unemployment in several countries in the region. Political uncertainty & low economic growth will cause hardships for the people who are expecting fundamental reforms and improvement in living standards. As a result of these changes the regional order is under great stress. The future of the peace treaties between Israel and Egypt, between Israel and Jordan is uncertain. The relations among key regional players will have a great bearing on the future of the region. Regional rivalries can undermine stability in the

area.

**Intervention:** The role of external actors is important but ambiguous. The principle of non-intervention and non-interference is being questioned. Are external interventions motivated by the hidden agenda of regime change, or, are interventions governed by humanitarian considerations alone? The jury is still out. The external intervention in Libya has set the precedent for similar interventions elsewhere. Syria is a test case.

**Extremism:** The rise of extremist elements is a matter of great concern. Al-Qaida type of terrorist outfits can gain foothold in the emerging vacuum. The situation in Mali, where extremist elements gained control of the capital briefly, is a case in point.

**Defence:** The geopolitical significance of the reform cannot be overstated. The uncertainties in the region have an impact on the security situation. In the last couple of years, there have been accretions of military forces in the area. In view of the great importance of the SLOCs, several countries have joined in a variety of naval exercises & deployment. The defence budgets of the regional powers have also been increasing in the recent years. The dangers of piracy & WMD proliferation remain ever present.

**India:** India has deep interests in the region. India cannot be indifferent to these major changes in its extended neighbourhood. India's key national interests are at stake: energy security; well being of the diaspora; economic & commercial ties, inward remittances and so on. India's security interests are closely intertwined with the security situation in the Gulf. Therefore, India has a stake in the security and stability in the region. At the same time, as the largest democracy, India cannot be insensitive to people's aspirations.

There are varying perspectives on these matters. This conference will discuss these and other issues in depth in the next three days. We look forward to a productive and constructive exchange of views.

Thank you and Jai Hind.

**Note:** Welcome address at the 15<sup>th</sup> Asian Security Conference on *Emerging Trends in West Asia: Regional and Global Implications*, 13 February 2013.

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**Source: Courtesy, IDSA**

**<http://www.idsa.in/video/Welcomeremarksatthe15thAsianSecurityConference>**

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