Introduction to Special Edition: Reflections on the Arab Spring and International Law: Three Years On

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Published online: 22 May 2014
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In September 2013 the School of Law at Liverpool John Moores University hosted a one day symposium titled ‘The Arab Spring: Two Years On’ at which several leading academic international lawyers gave their attention to key themes of the Arab Spring as they affected core international legal norms. The symposium took place almost exactly 2 years to the day on which an earlier conference also hosted by the School of Law had sought to provide an early understanding of the events of the Arab Spring,¹ and sought to take stock of developments during the intervening period. This special edition of the Liverpool Law Review contains revised and edited versions of the papers presented in September 2013.

In the first contribution Jackson Maogoto and Andrew Coleman consider the impact of the Arab Spring upon democracy in the region, with particular reference to the case of Egypt following the military’s removal of its first democratically elected President. They consider such vexed questions as democracy’s compatibility with Islam and the role of ‘foreign’ political factors upon constitutional developments in the Middle East, before demonstrating how Egypt can learn from the experience of Turkey—a state that is both Islamic and democratic—in its longer term constitutional development. The second contribution, from Nirmala Pillay, is also concerned with the case of Egypt. She devotes her attention to the removal from power of President Morsi and provides an assessment of this incident with reference to the rule of law doctrine.

A major theme of the events of the Arab Spring has concerned their relevance within the context of the doctrine of the *responsibility to protect* (RtoP), which provides the focus for my own contribution to this special edition. I consider the

¹ For edited versions of the papers presented at that conference, see Panara, C & Wilson, G (eds.), *The Arab Spring: New Patterns for Democracy and International Law* (Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2013).

extent to which international responses to events in Egypt, Libya and Syria represented instances of the application of the RtoP, drawing out some lessons to be taken from Libyan and Syrian episodes for the longer term relevance of the doctrine. The fourth and fifth contributions, from Christian Henderson and Jure Vidmar respectively, address some broader themes of international law which the events of the Arab Spring have touched upon. Henderson considers the notion of external state sovereignty in international law in light of the Arab Spring. He divides the notion into various parts and illustrates the impact of the Arab Spring upon these. Vidmar's focus is states' abuse of their sovereign powers and the ability of the international community to protect communal values where such abuses take place. He detects a shift away from state centrism within the international legal system to one built upon community values.

It is undoubtedly too soon to draw any definitive conclusions upon the longer term significance of the events of the Arab Spring. However, it has certainly forced international lawyers and international relations scholars alike to reconsider some key norms and principles in light of these events. The papers contained within this special edition of the *Liverpool Law Review* make an important contribution in this respect. We are grateful to all authors for their contributions, and especially to Dr Lorie Charlesworth, Editor in Chief of the Review, for commissioning this special edition.