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Relating Turkey to the Middle East and North Africa: Arab Spring and the Turkish Experience

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze the extent to which Turkish experience provided and continues to provide a model for democratization in North Africa and the Middle East (MENA). Using the 2011 (Arab Spring) mass movements, and the resulting shifts from autocratic regimes toward democratic ones, I argue that the Turkish experience offered a framework for MENA countries to address radical tendencies. The promise of the Turkish model existed despite the categorical rejection of protest by Turkish authorities.

Features of the Turkish model that appeal to the regimes in transition include its experience with parliamentary democracy, the successful shift from a limited economy controlled by elites to an open market system, and a turn from French-style secularism to a more flexible and inclusive model. In addition, Turkey's successful exit from a military tutelage demonstrated that a mild and peaceful transition away from autocracy is possible.

I also argue that, based on recent experiences, Turkey should exercise caution regarding its new regional power: Defense of democratic culture and regional cooperation have already created difficulties as Turkey seeks to build global influence and maintain friendly relationships with its neighboring countries. Nevertheless, Turkish policy makers must continue to develop proactive and consistent policies towards the MENA region, in order to preserve the legitimacy built over the last decade. Finally, if democratization and development are major goals

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for the transitioning MENA countries, I conclude that the models employed matter less than the speed at which goals are achieved.

Keywords
The Middle East and North Africa – Arab Spring – Turkish model – Political history of the Middle East – Democratization – International relations of the Middle East

The dynamics of the mass opposition movements that began in early 2011, what is now called the Arab Spring, brought the world's attention to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Turkey's recent and increasingly complex involvement in the process, along with its aspirations to be reckoned as a new regional power, expands possibilities for a debate around the use of the Turkish path to democracy, and its current style of democracy, as a model for the Muslim Middle East in general and for the Arab Spring countries in particular.

While some American and European policy makers and commentators join groups in the Arab world to promote Turkey as an active model for the region, Turkish officials reject the idea that Turkey should be perceived in this way. Instead, Turkish officials seem more sympathetic to the idea of Turkish democracy as an inspiration; perhaps because the former imposes Turkey while the latter does not. In the meantime Turkish authorities do not shy from adopting strong language regarding *the peoples' power* against the authoritarian leaders and expressing greater concern than leaders of other Western countries in their efforts to bring the Arab Spring to a fully-fledged success. The juxtaposition of internal Turkish political discourse and external foreign policy initiatives toward the region do suggest that Turkey is trying to produce influence in the region. If this influence is to be sustainable and if Turkey is to maintain its recently-built legitimacy in the region, Turkish authorities should be able to strike a balance between earlier declared policies towards the region and the dictates of *realpolitik*. Preventing the military interference of outside actors in the affairs of the Middle East was at the crux of Turkey's newly gained legitimacy in the eyes of the Arabs when the Grand National Assembly voted down the proposal for the positioning of American troops on Turkish soil against Iraq in 2003. The same position could not be taken during the uprisings in Libya, eight years later. When NATO decided to intervene on behalf of the opposition forces Turkey joined, though reluctantly and without combat engagement. When, owing to vetoes by Russia and China, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) failed to sanction intervention in Syria, Turkey called for international interference on behalf of the Syrian opposition. Citing human casualties (millions of civilians displaced and tens of thousands dead)[1] Turkish foreign policy makers demanded a UNSC decision to stop the violence of Al-Assad regime against its own people. A decade after its Parliament

rejected the positioning of American troops in its soil, Turkish foreign policy seems more accommodating towards a foreign intervention. In fact, realization of a need to develop joint policies with the United States—and to a certain extent Russia—to influence the developments in the neighborhood politics put Turkey at odds with its earlier position. This fluctuation tested Turkey's policy of zero conflict with neighbors, forcing the country to reevaluate its earlier non–interventionist stance (Oğuzlu 2012). Despite the uncertainties of future political landscape, Turkey still appeals to the Arab Spring countries and inspires them towards a smoother transition.

I do not argue here against Turkish politicians that Turkey does or should represent an outright model for the MENA countries. Instead, I will discuss in what ways and to what extent newly democratizing countries can benefit from the Turkish experience. My discussion therefore will revolve around the following three issues: First is the idea of the Turkish model, particularly where it is headed and who it serves. The second issue concerns the pillars of Turkey's role as a regional model and inspiration. Turkey's rooted experiences with the Parliamentary system, its successful application of open market economy and its adoption of a secular state model provide historically-established institutional practices. Unlike other discussions however, I argue that the Turkish model (a term I use here for the sake of practicality) has existed in and of itself, but historically disconnected from the Middle East and North Africa. The successful economic and administrative policies of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), along with the political choices of the current leadership towards the Middle East served to make Turkey's democratic experience an appealing alternative for the region not only to replace dictatorships and autocracy but also to balance Iranian and Saudi models. And finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the limitations and pitfalls of the idea of a Turkish model.

In what follows, I first outline the historical dynamics which prepared the ground for Arab masses to demand more democratic rights from the ruling regimes and leaders—which resulted in the toppling of some authoritarian leaders and led others onto a similar track. After focusing on the debate surrounding the idea of a Turkish model and its major references from historical experiences, I look at ways the agency of the JDP awakened the Turkish model when it attempted to make the country's democratic standards comparable to those of the European Union and when, defying Turkish political traditions, the JDP adopted proactive policies towards the Middle East. Turkey's continued relevance to the Arab Spring has depended on the country's efforts to elevate its own democratic standards. In the last section of this article, I draw attention to the disparity between the perceived image of Turkey and its real capacities, and ways these differences would hamper its policies in the region.

Historical dynamics

The Middle East is a region invented, defined, and redefined by European colonial powers. (Bilgin 2004, Fromkin 1989). During the 19th century, Russia, the United Kingdom and France had their own zones of interest, and ethnic and religious communities of influence, in the Balkan and the Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The Middle East, as it emerged after the Great War, was a *working* version of conflicting promises made by the United Kingdom to France, Arabs and the Zionists (Fromkin 1989: 173–199). With the addition of new states to the European protectorate, the Eastern Question became the Middle East.

One significant reason for the lack of representative democracy in the Middle East is the political culture produced by the mandate system after World War I. The colonial presence of the United Kingdom and France institutionalized the culture of foreign influence as a *tutelage* system. Almost all of the newly created Middle East states struggled to exit from this foreign control between the two World Wars—mostly to no avail. Political independence was believed to be a first rather than the final step. Although some nations had negotiated independence before World War II, the heavy financial burden the War inflicted upon European societies accelerated postwar independence movements, and several independent states emerged in the Middle East and North Africa. Egypt had gained its nominal independence in 1922; Saudi Arabia in 1926 and Iraq in 1932. Postwar independence was achieved by Syria and Lebanon in 1941; Israel (1948); Libya (1951); Tunisia (1955); Morocco (1956); Kuwait (1961); Algeria (1962); People's Republic of South Yemen (later, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) 1967; and Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in 1971.

Declarations of independence did not mean a state had achieved full sovereignty: France and the United Kingdom each kept sizable numbers of troops in their former protectorates and the European or Western influence has never completely disappeared. The United Kingdom, France and, after 1950s, the United States remained closely involved in the region because of its rich energy resources and also for strategic reasons. As former colonies or protectorates these new states and regimes owed in large part their "independence" to the colonial past.

Another major reason which hampered the development of representative democracies in the region can be attributed to the emergence of the state of Israel in 1948. The defeat of the united Arab forces (Palestinian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Egyptian, Syrian and Saudi) in 1948 by the better-equipped and better-trained Israeli forces created a long-lasting excuse for these regimes. The military power of Israel was considered the true threat; security concerns should

take precedence over democracy. That these regimes have registered no single victory against Israel did not shake the grounds of authoritarian regimes.

The involvement of outside actors must also be considered, as their policies deepened the security-centered paradigm in the region during the Cold War. The United States policies reflected concerns for the security of the state of Israel and access to oil supplies. Soviets, on the other hand hoped to counter the American dominance in the region. As a result, support from one of these superpowers provided stability to the leader and his regime, and legitimacy abroad. In return, democracy, and peoples' demands for freedom and better lives were ignored.

An irony of the Cold War situation in the Middle East was that both Israeli military power and Soviet aspirations towards the region functioned as legitimizing mechanisms for the autocratic regimes, and both nurtured those leaders' distaste for democracy. Leaders who were on good terms with Israel and the Western oil industry enjoyed a high level of Western support, despite their diminishing popularity at home. An example of these fluctuating relationships is Egypt. Jamal Abd Al-Nasir's (d. 1970) anti-Western and anti-Israel policies were replaced by a peacemaking leader, Anwar al-Sadat. After al-Sadat's assassination on 6 October 1981 Hosni Mubarak took the office. Loyalty to the Camp David accord meant that Mubarak enjoyed a high level of Western support and American aid that was exceeded only by that given to the state of Israel. Two decades after the end of the Cold War, Mubarak was still "winning" elections with incredible margins and was receiving affirmation from the secretary of the United States (Rice 2005).[2] Cushioned by the blessing of the West, other autocrats (in the Gulf region for instance) did not even bother with phony elections.

Condolezza Rice commented on the policy patterns, in an essay reflecting events of the Arab Spring, making clear the level of American backing for the status quo in the region and its goals: "…the United States had, in the Middle East more than any other region, sought stability at the expense of democracy, and had achieved neither." (Rice 2011).

The end of the Cold War did not shake the ground of some Middle Eastern and North African regimes. Even in Turkey, which has been practicing a credible multi-party system, it took more than a decade to seriously consider elevating democratic standards.[3]

Arab Spring

The mass movement now referred to collectively as the Arab Spring began in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, when a street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, set himself on fire to protest his harassment and humiliation by officials. Public response—demonstrations and rioting—spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen,

Jordan, Algeria and more surprisingly to oil-rich countries in the region: Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Rebellion by the people defined the year 2011 in the MENA region. At first, the West suspected that this rebellion was the beginning of a long-feared wave of radical Islamism in the region, as this was generally considered the only alternative to the Western-allied oppressive authoritarian regimes. This worry proved groundless (Bayat 2011) as the Muslim Brethren of Egypt, the most powerful opposition to the Mubarak regime, did not even bother to join the demonstrations until the second week. It soon became clear that masses who joined the uprising against the authoritarian regimes were coalitions of groups with different ideologies and beliefs, and that they were demanding more rights, better jobs, freedom and hope.

Popular uprisings led some hopeful commentators in the MENA region to interpret events as the beginning of a new era of people's democracy in the Middle East. The Middle East, a region which was ostracized from the legitimate history, would finally embrace democracy after the first decade of the 21st century and regain its rightful place in the world.[4] The torch of freedom and democracy which was ignited in Tunisia by a street vendor was spreading to the rest of the region. One could argue that the Muslim Middle East was finally going through a set of revolutions comparable to those which took place in Europe against the *Ancien Régime* during the early decades of the 19th century (Palmer 1959: 323–489, Godechot 1956). This was revolution with a very modern twist: networks of friendships formed through the Internet social media (Facebook, Google and Twitter) could at any moment turn into a coalition of opposition movements with the power to destabilize authoritarian regimes in the region. This was indeed a new moment in the Muslim Middle East and North Africa, and in the rest of the world.

The uprisings that seemed successful in toppling the authoritarian leaders in Tunisia and Egypt were not so elsewhere. Libya stalled into a civil war, and opposition in Syria and Yemen was crushed ruthlessly by government forces. With the help of NATO airstrikes, anti-Qaddafi forces in Libya were able to topple the regime in late August 2011, and he was captured in Sirte and brutally killed. Syria seems to be plunging willingly into a civil war and Salih of Yemen is finally leaving office (though officially to seek medical help in the U.S.) (MacFarquhar 2011a). Uprisings in other countries, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain and Morocco, produced no regime change. Rulers did not accede to demonstrators' demands, except for some financial giveaways by the king of Saudi Arabia amounting to more than 70 billion dollars (MacFarquhar 2011b) and the Moroccan king's decision to accept limitation to his power (Govan 2011).[5]

Surprisingly, the protests had no leaders, and espoused no cohesive ideology, religion or movement. To make matters worse, most protesters did not

seem to have plans for a future after they had seized power. The Cold War status quo was finally was shattering in the MENA region, but in the midst of a prolonged financial crisis no major power seemed ready to tackle the challenges of the new uncertainties.

A dilemma arose for the supporters of the status quo: if they did not express sympathies for the new dynamics: they might fall to the wrong side of history. Although the U.S. president Barack Obama seemed supportive of the opposition in Tunisia, once the uprisings spread to Egypt early statements by U.S. officials conflicted with each other. (Cooper & et al. 2011) A general concern was that democratic elections would bring Islamic movements into power (as did happen in Tunisia and Egypt) creating a need to sanction Islamic governments in the region, a step the West was not ready to take.

Why Turkey?

Western Perspectives

The events of the Arab Spring raised new debates among intellectuals, analysts and statesmen regarding the Turkish model of democracy. During the early stages of the uprisings, a major concern was the directions each movement would, ultimately, take. Western powers that had invested in the stability provided by autocratic rulers worried that if democracy ensued it would undermine established Western interests in the region. On the other hand, some of those who were fighting for democratic rights in the Arab world worried that the West would co-opt the new revolutionary dynamic and cause their failure.

Part of the concerns of United States diplomacy resulted from the way the image of the U.S. was tainted by support for the authoritarian regimes in the region, and by the unjustified war on Iraq and subsequent occupation in 2003. When Obama took office in 2008 he attempted to repair the tarnished image of his country in the Muslim world and his visit to Turkey was the first step towards that objective. Obama's 2009 speech, made at Cairo University, promised friendship to the Muslim world and declared that the time had come for a Palestinian state suggested a real breakthrough to Muslims around the world. Two years later, however, President Obama withdrew his support for an independent Palestinian state, and tried to deter those who supported the Palestinian bid through the United Nations Security Council (Obama 2011). To the Arab world Obama's message was clear: the U.S. would hold its traditional ground. Accordingly, the poor standing of the U.S. among protesters meant its strategists and diplomats could not openly assume a direct guardianship role in the Arab Spring.

Still, in the wake of millions of Arabs demonstrating against ruthless leaders and for a better life and freedom, the Obama government could not maintain a Cold War-style position toward the region. Official U.S. support for democrat-

ic transitions in the MENA region could not overlook the possibility of support for the installation of Islam-oriented parties, but they also recognized damage to America's image as the purveyor of democracy to the modern world, should they stay aloof. Instead of relying on direct military intervention, as in Iraq, the United States chose to support an existing regional democratic model during this transition period. Turkey, on the other hand, seems to be content with the opportunity for close cooperation with the United States provided by the Arab Spring although those policies serve United States goals more clearly than those of Turkey. The U.S. has been able to achieve such goals as taming Turkey's aspirations to become an independent regional power; balancing the growing role of Iran, reminding Turkey of continued threats from Russia (still deeply involved in Syria) and emphasizing that positive results may take time and require cooperation with global powers.

The idea of the Turkish model of democracy serving the MENA region had been proposed at least twice before 2011. The first opportunity was in Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Republic, salient features of which were westernizing and secularizing the nation state. Ataturk's model was imitated by Iran, under Reza Shah Pahlavi (abd. 1941), and later by Tunisia and (partly) Algeria. The idea of Turkish democracy as a model emerged for the second time after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990s. Turkey's westernizing and secularizing nation-state aspects were presented to the newly emerging independent Turkish states in Central Asia by Western advisors. (Mango 1993, Mütercimler 1993, Bal 2000). Turkey was a successful model of a self-imposed westernization program. Turkish experience with aspects of European democratic institutions was a safeguard, propositions implied, against the possibilities of rising extremism and anti-Westernism. After Russia made a strong return to its former territories references to the Turkish model by the West also disappeared.

The Turkish model debate resurfaced at the beginning of the Arab Spring. Perhaps it was a result of fears that the collapse of the autocratic regimes would lead to Islamist take over. If that were to happen, Western protectors of the old regimes recognized two possible results. The adoption of sweeping anti-Westernism in the region could prevent Western access to the markets and rich resources of the region. Alternatively, a controlled passage from Western-supported authoritarianism to democratic systems might take place, with domination by Islam-oriented parties. The latter seemed the more obvious path, but which outside actor would be able to provide the legitimizing framework for this smooth transition?

Of the possible models for controlled transformation Turkey seemed the best candidate for the Western world for several reasons. It already held an anchored position in the Western world and, more important, even under

an allegedly Islamist party Turkey has not deviated from the principles of secularism and open market economy. In 2003 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of the then newly-founded JDP, disowned the anti-Western and anti-capitalist political discourse of Necmeddin Erbakan's National Vision (*Milli Görüş*) movement.[6] Erdoğan's action assured the Western world of the nature of the new party. The JDP defined itself with a newly coined term "conservative democrat" (Akdoğan 2004) perhaps to defeat the charges of Islamism. The intrinsic assumption made in the Western world was that an anti-Western discourse in Turkey was tamed after seizing the power via democratic elections. Why not work toward the same end in the Arab Spring countries especially if, or after, Islamist parties won the elections? Here Turkey clearly sets a framework for further inspiration.

Turkey's involvement in the Arab Spring as a pro-democracy regional actor seems to parallel the European Union's democratization agenda for the Middle East (Pace 2009). Although there has been visible discontent towards Turkey's full membership by France and Germany, these two major actors of the European Union seem to agree on the value of Turkey as a model for the newly emerging democracies, so long as Turkey does not insert itself as a regional hegemonic power.

More importantly, although Turkey's hopes for full membership in the Union were ground down by the leaders of France and Germany (Sarkozy and Merkel), its traditional western-oriented policies and open market economy suggested to the Arab Spring countries a door to many financial and cultural ties with Europe. Turkey's agenda regarding its full membership in the European Union provides, for both Turkey and the EU, a mutually legitimizing relationship. Even without a proactive agenda, Turkey's support of democratization process in these regimes (discursive and institutional) would serve as a nullifying factor for certain extreme anti-Western groups that sought to share in the newly emerging power politics.

Regional perceptions of the Turkish model idea

There is no scholarly consensus regarding the aspects of the Turkish experience that might constitute a reference for the Arab Spring countries. Despite several invocations of Turkey as an inspiration by different actors there is still considerable criticism of Turkey assuming such a role. Critics of the Turkish model mainly argue that Turkey has too many deficiencies in its practice of democracy to be effective or useful. (Bâli 2011, Akkoyunlu 2012) Examples frequently cited by politicians, scholars and journalists include arrests and trials of journalists, generals who allegedly planned a coup against the government, and the prime minister's personal dislike of criticism. Other critics argue that the Turkish model debates and Turkey's proactive role in offering itself to the MENA region make Turkey look like a third world country when, instead Turkey

should focus its attention on full membership in the European Union. Reva Bhalla, Middle East analyst for Stratfor[7] has argued that new regimes in MENA countries do seek for outside support but not a replacement for outside domination. For others, Turkey's proactive foreign policy towards the MENA region is nothing less than a quest to revive the glory of the Ottoman Empire. (Quercia 2011, Öktem et al. 2012).

Nevertheless, the JDP has already inspired several actors throughout the region: A number of Arab populations consider Turkey an inspiration and see Prime Minister Erdogan as an important leader for the region. According to a recent survey by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) a clear majority of people (78%) in 16 MESA countries think positively of Turkey. Nearly the same percentage believe Turkey contributes most the peace to the region and 71% consider Turkey the country most likely to play the peacemaker role in regional conflicts (Akgün and Gündoğar 2012: 6, 18–21).

The emerging leadership in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia also expressed contentment at having Turkey on their side. Mustafa Abd al-Jalil, leader of Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC), indicated that Libya would take Turkey as a model for its political and democratic system, noting in particular its appropriateness for other Arab Spring countries as well.[8] On the occasion of, his visit to Turkey the new prime minister of Libya, Abd al-Rahim al-Kib, also underlined that Libya considers Turkey as a model.[9]

Turkey's relations with Tunisia were neither close nor intense before the Arab Spring movement. However, the leadership that surfaced after the withdrawal of Ben Ali's regime nurtures specific sympathies towards Turkey, both its regime and its leadership. Several times Rashid al-Ghannushi, the recognized leader of a Tunisian Islamic opposition movement, has cited Turkey as a workable example of harmony between democracy and Islam, and also the JDP's success in lifting the economy. However, responding to a question whether the government would adopt secularism like Turkey, al-Ghannushi also pointed to the unique circumstances of his country, demarcating a sensitive line against perceiving Turkey as the only source for the future.[10]

Interestingly, invocation of Turkey as a model in the Arab world has not been limited to the emerging new leadership: protection for non-Islamist entities, another feature of the Turkish model, appeals to those constituencies as well. After a visit to Turkey, Maronite Patriarch Beshara Rai of Lebanon called for Arab Spring countries to emulate the Turkish model because it separates religion from politics and respects the existence of other religions in the country (2012).

Another feature influential in drawing attention to the democratic model of Turkey was the JDP's smooth accession to power with electoral victory. As Al-Azm explained this stunned and amazed the Syrian intelligentsia:

> [there was] wide appreciation among the Damascus intelligentsia that both the Arab World and Islam in general are in dire need right now of a reasonably free, democratic and secular model that works in a Muslim society. Turkey is seen at the moment as the most likely place for such a model to develop and mature, especially given the assistance of possible EU membership and the safeguards it provides (2011: 637).

Al-Azm looked to writing by the Lebanese social thinker and critic 'Ali Harb to elaborate on the challenge that the JDP's electoral victory posed throughout the Arab world and in the Islamic movements in particular:

> How was a political party of a religious background and an Islamic origin able to lead Turkey with remarkable success in the eyes of the world, lead it in all matters and affairs: politics, education, economics and security both at the internal and external levels? More clearly, how do we explain the success of Turkish Islam, if we may say so, and the failure of the other Islamic models in most other arenas? (2011: 636–637, citing from Ali Harb 2008).

As mayhem continues in Syria it is not clear how much the Erdoğan government still inspires the Syrian intelligentsia or when and if Al-Assad will be toppled. Instead, the current crisis in Turkey's neighbor challenges Turkish foreign policy principles towards the Middle East, as no end result is yet clear. Despite all, Turkey makes every effort to bring the current humanitarian crises to an end in Syria.

Whither Turkey?

To date, discussions about the Turkish model in the MENA region focus on the agency of the JDP while ignoring the historical formation of major tenets of the Turkish experience. For Dede, JDP's Islamic roots, Turkey's proactive foreign policy and its emergence as a soft power constitute the major elements of the Turkish model. (2011). Kirişçi identifies three major elements of Turkey's "demonstrative presence," a term he prefers to "model." They are: Turkey's recent rise as the trading state, the Turkish experience with democracy as a work in-progress, and Turkey's new proactive foreign policy (Kirişçi 2011). Aras and Akarçeşme attributes Turkey's relevance to the legacy of the minister Davutoğlu's "zero conflict with neighbors" policy, as well as recently acquired soft power instruments. For them, Turkey's economic success and the JDP's ability to maintain political stability contributed to Turkey's "order instituting" aspirations in the region (Aras & Akarçeşme 2012), another ideal Davutoğlu set for Turkish

foreign policy. While acknowledging contributions of these articles to the debate I highlight historical experiences of Turkey with democratic institutions as major sources of the Turkish model and consider them as separate from the agency and proactive role of the JDP. The JDP government was the main actor in the legitimization process that brought this Turkish experience to the MENA region in a promising geopolitical framework.

A recent debate aroused further curiosity about which version of the Turkish model should be promoted to the Arab Spring regimes: the uncompromisingly secular version under a military tutelage which emerged after 1960 –from which Turkey has been trying to exit—or the more democratic version which was marked by the JDP policies after 2002. Commenting on Egyptian SCAF's attitudes towards the rise of the new civilian politics, Steven Cook suggested that adoption of the path of Turkish military would not be a good idea for Egypt (2011). But the reaction from the Turkish government came after the appearance of an article by Fouad Ajami in *The Wall Streeet Journal* (Ajami 2012). Ajami argued that, for Egypt, a controlled passage to democracy under the observance of the military by implying an earlier version of Turkish democracy would be a good option instead of chaos. The outspoken minister for EU Affairs and chief negotiator of Turkey, Egemen Bağış, responded in a letter to *The Wall Street Journal* that Turkey has long left the military tutelage era, and stressed that "the Turkish model is democracy." He wrote that:

> […] a past, which Turkey had buried, is proposed as a future for brotherly Egypt … that a civilian government with a puppet image under the military's custodial rule is not the Turkish model. We utterly and categorically reject this slander. That political sham may have been an unfortunate imposition on Turkey but is now dead and buried. That model means corruption, political assassinations, death squads, political polarization, looted banks, 110% inflation and a closed economy based on pillaging. If these fiction writers need a 'model' for this sham, the correct term is not the Turkish, but the Baathist model. This is the model currently followed in Damascus. This model won't last long and certainly cannot be imposed on Cairo… Our pro-EU path is irreversible, and we ultimately aim to upgrade our nation and elevate our political, economic and democratic standards to those of the European Union. We cannot and will not condone any political system that falls short of addressing the full democratic aspirations of its people. This includes the brotherly Egyptian people and certainly the oppressed and proud Syrian people. (2012)

Bağış's strong statements regarding the democratic nature of the Turkish model in fact indicate that there is official acceptance that Turkey constitutes a model, one which is European and fully democratic. Perhaps for

some others Turkey constitutes a model only because as a Muslim country it was able to co-exist peacefully with democracy.

Turkish Experience: from past to present relevance

Curiously enough, an article about Turkey as a model for emerging Islamic democracies appeared in *The New Yorker* ten years ago. (Remnick 2002). The core of this essay, by David Remnick, is an interview with Orhan Pamuk, later (2006) winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. The article discusses the JDP's surprising landslide victory in the 2002 elections, only a few years after the Turkish military's post-modern intervention in politics and ensuing repetitive economic crises. This was the first time an Islamic rooted as it was perceived—party won national elections in Turkey. Remnick mirrored the worries of the traditional Western supporters and of the secular elites in Turkey as he analyzed touchstones of transformation of the political movement once led by Necmeddin Erbakan. As the founder of the National Order Party (1970-71) and then the National Salvation Party (fl 1972-81) Erbakan was adamant about setting an anti-western and anti-consumerism political agenda: he was daring enough to suggest a common economic union—like the EU—and a common currency among the Muslim countries. He served as Prime Minister in the coalition government (1996-97) but, owing to his anti-western discourse, the military pressured him to resign. The coalition was dissolved in June 1997, thus the post-modern coup. Remnick's article, which includes interviews with the journalists Cengiz Çandar and Fehmi Koru as well as with Pamuk, addresses some critical questions about the newly-elected and newly-powerful JDP: Would it be a threat to democratic system and secularism? Would its new leadership adapt, to establish an accord with the West and the open market economy? While highlighting the precedence of people's power referring to the elections, Pamuk seemed worried about the possibility of political Islam excluding people like him, i.e. outspoken seculars. Çandar and Koru on the other hand seemed confident that the future would bring a positive synthesis between democracy and Islam in Turkey.

Remnick's discussion was prescient in the way it offered a political framework for developments that were to take place in Turkey and its environment.[11] The author noted Turkey's shortcomings in democracy identified by Bernard Lewis "the outsized role of the military in politics, instances of censorship, the persistence of torture in the precinct houses and prisons" but still highlighted Turkey's potential:

> Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, and with particular energy since September 11, 2001, many analysts have pointed to Turkey as an exemplar of regional enlightenment, a model of moderate secularism and democratic ambition. (Remnick 2002)

In fact, after 2002 Turkey went through a massive reform program as part of an effort to elevate its democratic standards to match those of European democracies and to remove obstacles in the functioning of open market economy. In 2004, Turkey secured a negotiation date for full membership with the EU. From that point, it seemed that Turkey had realized the normative vision of Ziya Gokalp, set in early 1920s, "to leave the circle of Ottoman civilization completely and to enter the circle of European civilization." (Gökalp 1976) However, Merkel and Sarkozy set *de facto* limitations on Turkey's Europeanization program by refusing to continue with promised negotiations—allegedly for "cultural" (generally interpreted as "religious") reasons.

As I argued earlier, the major tenets of the Turkish model are independent of the agency of the JDP. A parliamentary system was first created in 1870–71, and has been in place continuously since 1908. The insistence on a westernization or modernization agenda, and a free market economy have roots in Ottoman administration. The secular state identity adopted in 1928 also legitimizes Turkish democracy in the eyes of the West. Political and social occurrences in Turkey since 2002 activated the historical experiences and established the parameters by which Turkey may be considered and referred to as an inspiration and model for the Arab Spring countries.

But the Turkish model needed to be adjusted before it could be presented to the region as a source of inspiration. As Remnick suggested in 2002 and Taspinar in 2003, Turkey needed to raise the degree of democracy available in its system. This elevation could be achieved by strengthening the role of the parliament (i.e. civilian authority), distancing the JDP from the radical political discourse of the movement from which it emerged, and increasing the efficiency of the open market system. All of these took place true the agency of the JDP in a fast track motion during the last decade. After its electoral victory, the JDP had to demonstrate its capability on several fronts: while trying to establish its legitimacy vis-à-vis the regime and the secular elite the new leadership also tried hard to transform the civilian-military relations. This was especially important in the post 1998 "post-modern coup."

Softening the radical discourse of political Islam, in other words making peace with secularism against the anti-Western and anti-free market discourse of Erbakan was one important issue the JDP had to face. In fact, the secular elites in the country constantly tested JDP loyalty to Erbakan's anti-Western discourse. Though Erdoğan disowned the *milli gürüş* policies and the JDP had been very careful to show the public that it had no plans to alter the current secular system, these were not always sufficient for members of the military. Major media outlets continued to float arguments first presented in the 1960 coup, against the JDP. Recent court trials have alleged that factions from the Turkish Armed Forces several times plotted coups against

the JDP governments, though none was achieved.[12] More recent trials of high-ranking members of the Army marks the turning point between military and the civilian leadership in Turkey. For now, the civilian authority carries the day and a key aspect of this shift has been in its peaceful nature.

The real value of the Turkish model lies in its experience with military tutelage and the ways Turkey managed to curb the political aspirations of extra-civilian forces. Although it was not achieved easily, the current peace between the Turkish military and the ruling party contributes to unity around major democratic principles, thereby strengthening the basis of civil rights in the country.

The problem of Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), now unwilling to leave the country to civilian leaders despite free national elections, requires skillful application of a peaceful process similar to that which occurred in Turkey in the previous decade. If there will be a transition to democratic system in Syria, the wounds inflicted by the current regime on its own civilian population again will require a patient process of reconciliation with other ethnic groups.

Secularism

While trying to make the Turkish army concede to civilian authority, the JDP has also worked to soften the uncompromising version of secularism, which has proved to be one of the most difficult aspects of Republican revolutions. The French-style, monolithic, "militant laïcite" Turkey adopted (Arslan 2005) would not be acceptable to Muslim Arab populations. Over the last decade, contestations between the state and Islamic political movements have re-focused the concept of *laïcite* in Turkey so that it now resembles the more flexible Anglo–Saxon interpretation. JDP's success in the last three consecutive elections forced those who promoted "militant laïcite" to reconcile with an emerging force in Turkish politics; a more inclusive understanding of secularism as a constitutional principle emerged.

One major battleground in all the Arab Spring countries is secularism—whether to adopt it and, if so, to what extent. New ruling groups in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt are struggling to find a solution to satisfy both the traditionally suppressed Islamist movements and the established secularized and westernized classes. For Western observers, the possibility of an emergence of extreme Islamist tendencies, even if voiced cautiously, is worrisome. Although the marketability of Turkish-style secularism might be challenging in Middle-Eastern environments where Islamism has been a way to unite against secular authoritarian regimes, the JDP's transforming of secularism may discourage radical tendencies. After all, majority leadership of the party consists of practicing Muslims, though almost none seems to reject secularism.

Open market economy

Turkey's painful experience in becoming a modern world economy is instructive, especially for those MENA countries without the economic benefits of oil and gas reserves. Turkey's decades-long struggle to create a local class of capital owners may be instrumental in the efforts of diversification of sources.

In the early years of the Republic, the paucity of Turkish capital owners led to the implementation of a state-run development model; main goal of creating a strong class of Turkish entrepreneurs was only recently achieved. Despite the world financial crises, during the last few years Turkish economy has been growing at a record rate, second only to that of China. Reaching this point exacted a toll, however. When the JDP government took office in 2002 the country was in financial ruin, with a GDP of around US$ 2,200 per person and considerable foreign debt. Although an earlier deal between the IMF and Turkey required tight budget control and other austerity measures, the JDP government went beyond what was necessary. Such proactive policies as bringing Foreign Direct Investment into Turkey, easing the legal process to form a company, actively encouraging investments in key industries and export aided the steady growth rate and led to Turkey's position as a model for financial success.[13]

Turkey's successful exit from a state controlled economic model during the 1980s could be a major source of inspiration for Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Despite initial resistance to policies introduced by Turgut Özal when he was a deputy Prime Minister (the January 24, 1980 decisions), bringing Turkey from a closed, state-controlled system to an open market economy proved to be a long-term success for Turkey. When Özal became prime minister of Turkey as the founder of Motherland Party (Anavatan) in 1983, he continued the open market economic policies; and promoted an export-led growth strategy instead of import substitution. He curbed subsidies, reformed the poorly-performing tax system and encouraged foreign direct investment in Turkey. Although Turkey suffered a near economic collapse during the decade after Özal's death in 1993, the emerging dynamic business class assisted the country to transform itself from anew into the post-Cold War era.

Plunged into economic and political uncertainty, the region may need a sincere inspirer as a means for peaceful reconciliation of the past with the future. JDP government had been trying to serve such a role in the years leading up to the start of the Arab Spring, by engaging its neighbors through high level economic integrations. Most of these initiatives were halted due to uncertainties in the region. The JDP's economic successes, including the steady growth rate, raising per capita income five-fold within a decade, and the resilience of a dynamic entrepreneur class gives the country a unique position in the region.

Turkey's active participation in the transformation of Arab Spring countries may at this point prevent losing time as the transition from a state controlled economy to more liberal and diversified one, an almost inevitable path for some of the MENA countries, begins to take place. Although major economic activity revolves around natural resources in some of these countries, the Turkish experience may be relevant for Tunisia, Iraq, Egypt and (if there will ever be a transition to democracy) Syria.

Conclusion: Limitations of the Turkish Model Idea

Despite the official statements to the contrary, Turkey appears poised to lead the emerging democracies in the MENA countries by inspiration; current geo-political dynamics favor such a role. The Arab Spring regimes also appear willing to accept Turkey in such a role, as long as its policies do not revert to a dictating, big brother position. The outside global actors also seem to sanction this position for Turkey-at least-for the time being. Thus, Turkey assumes a Western-style role by trying to promote principles of democracy, human rights and participation of women in social life; goals Western nations have largely ceased to pursue in the energy-rich parts of the Middle East.

As argued above, Turkey remains the most relevant reference for the Arab Spring countries not because JDP has Islamic roots or because of the party's desire to be perceived as a regional model. Instead, it is Turkey's strong legacy of a parliamentary system, successful application of open market economy-without relying on natural resources-and its transformed model of secular system of government that give the Turkish experience its value. In addition, Turkey's ongoing struggles to extract itself from a military tutelage, and to shift from a state dominated economic system to enriched open market economy may offer a valuable roadmap to other societies in the region.

On the other hand, as the cases of Libya and Syria have demonstrated, there are limitations to the power of Turkey. Turkey should not exaggerate its power in the region and it should coordinate actions or negotiate with certain other regional and global actors, namely Russia and Iran. Furthermore, backing of the United States will be important to achieving some of Turkey's regional objectives.

In addition, sympathies toward Turkey in the newly emerging leadership in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya have made the major emphasis of their relations the Islamic movements. Turkey, as a secular democracy, can and should be able to appeal the secular groups in these countries. These groups, owing to associations with the displaced regimes, may be alienated by the rising new political leadership such as the Muslim Brethren in Egypt or al-Nahda in Tunisia. Yet access to expertise of these secular groups and their integration into the new system will certainly smooth the transition process. Although it

has not been utilized in this way, Turkey can and should play a constructive role in integrating these groups with the newly emerging democratic system, so that the perceived rift in these societies is lessened in the future.

Faced with Syrian humanitarian concerns and issues of regional brotherhood, Turkey's discourse faced its limits in dealings with Russia and China, permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Turkey's aspirations for a more democratic Syria heavily clashed with Iran's regional priorities, protecting its sectarian networks in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Iran's unconditional support for the Al-Assad regime seems to shatter a pricy friendship for Turkey. In the same manner, Turkey's pro-people stance irked the Saudi leadership, as the Kingdom escaped the heavy damages that the Arab Spring could have inflicted.

Turkey's support for Syrian opposition also brought the Maliki-led government in Iraq to the verge of a clash. Showing closer affinities to Iran, Maliki accused Erdoğan of interfering in the internal affairs of Iraq. Turkey's support for the opposition in Syria also seems threaten the strategic alliance between Russia and Turkey, as Putin's government continues its support of Syria.

Last but not least, Turkey's main objective has been to promote a peaceful, more democratic and equally developed MENA region. The scope and the limit of this aspiration will obviously be determined by each and every individual case (country) that (and if they) would consider Turkey a valuable inspiration in the process of transformation. Whether the societies and the regimes in this part of the world reach this objective inspired by Turkey, by another country or by developing their own unique path matters little, as long as they reach there.

Comments

[1] The number of refugees in Turkey, Jordan and Iraq, and the daily death toll are increasing exponentially, making the Syrian conflict the worst catastrophe of the Arab Spring.

[2] Condolezza Rice praised the 2005 elections during her visit to Egypt. "Rice: Question and Answer at the American University in Cairo Press Release: US State Department, 21 June 2005. Retrieved from http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO0506/S00328/rice-qa-at-the-american-university-in-cairo.htm (accessed 11/11/2011)

[3] Turkey has been practicing a limited Western-style democracy; its shortcomings are the legacy of repeated coups. The first of these coups, in 1960, drastically altered the early democratic constitution of the Republic. Since then, civilian elites were permitted to practice politics only within a framework delineated by the constitutions written at the behest of the coup leaders by members of judiciary who supported their actions. Earlier governments attempted to move toward greater democratization by curbing the influence of the military in politics with limited success. The currently active and comprehensive reform program, introduced by the JDP in 2002, is focused on making Turkey a better candidate for full membership to the EU.

[4] MFA Ahmed Davutoğlu indicated that the Arab Spring is a delayed process of history: ntv news 1/11/2011. Retrieved from http://tvarsivi.com/disisleri-bakani-ahmet-davutoglu-arap-bahari-gec-kalinmis-bir-surec-aciklamasinda-bulundu-01-11-2011-izle-i_2011110005092.html.

[5] The amendments to the constitution to that effect were accepted by a referendum held on July 1, 2011. "Large 'yes' to Moroccan reforms but opponents cry foul," Retrieved from http://www.euronews.net/2011/07/02/large-yes-to-moroccan-reforms-butopponents-cry-foul (accessed 30/12/ 2011).

[6] *Radikal* December 26, 2003.

[7] See Stratfor Global Intelligence website: http://www.stratfor.com.

[8] "Turkey Model for Countries of Arab Spring" Retrieved from http://www.turkishny.com/english-news/5-english-news/80356-turkey-model-for-Arab-Spring-countries (accessed: 15/2/ 2012).

[9] ""Türkiye'ye model olarak bakıyoruz". Retrieved fro http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/planet/19999529.asp (accessed 25/2/2012)

[10] Interview with Ghannushi: "We perceive Turkey as a model." January 13 2012 Retrieved from http://tr.euronews.com/ 2012/01/13/tunuslu-lider-gannusi-turkiye-yi-model-olarak-goruyoruz/ (accessed 4/9/2012).

[11] A year after Remnick's article an insightful policy analysis discussed whether Turkey would be a model for democracies emerging in the Arab World: Omer Taspınar "An Uneven Fit? The "Turkish Model" and the Arab World," *Analyses Paper* No. 5 (2003: The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution).

[12] As of this writing, the trials have yet to produce conclusive decisions about the fate of the defendants.

[13] At 8.2% (2010); and 8.5% (2011); Turkey's growth rate has been the second highest in the world after China. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) *Factbook* Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html. Accessed: 4/9/2012

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Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika ile İlişkilendirilmesi: Arap Baharı ve Türk Tecrübesi

M. Akif Kireçci*

Özet

Bu makale 2011 yılı başında Kuzey Afrika ve Ortadoğu'da ortaya çıkan ve Arap Baharı diye adlandırılan halk hareketlerinin tarihsel dinamiklerini ele alarak Türkiye'nin demokratik tecrübelerinin neden ve hangi ölçüde "model" olabileceğini incelemektedir. Türk yöneticiler tarafından kabul görmese de "Türk modeli" kavramı Batı ve Ortadoğu'daki belli başlı aktörler tarafından kullanılmakta ve teklif edilmektedir. Bu anlamda makale Türk tecrübesinin Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika bölgesinde otoriter sistemlerden demokrasiye geçişte radikal eğilimleri önleme noktasında kontrollü bir geçiş sağlayacağı için önerildiğini savunmaktadır.

Köklü bir parlamenter sisteme sahip olması, devlet ve sınırlı elit kontrollü bir ekonomiden açık pazar ekonomisine başarıyla geçmesi ve Fransız modeli laiklik anlayışını kapsayıcı modele doğru dönüştürebilmesi Türkiye'yi bölge için ilham kaynağı yapacak temel özelliklerdir. Türkiye'nin askerî vesayet sisteminden başarılı ve kansız bir mücadele ile daha etkin bir demokratik sisteme geçmiş olması bölgede otoriter rejimlerden demokrasiye geçişte ılımlı bir sürecin mümkün olduğunu da teyit etmiştir.

Bunların yanı sıra makale Türkiye'nin bölgedeki gücünü de abartmaması gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Türkiye demokratik kültürü ve daha fazla bölgesel dayanışmayı savunurken bazı küresel aktörlerin rızası hilafına etki üretmenin de ne kadar zor olduğunu Libya ve Suriye örneklerinde görmüştür. Arap Baharı sürecinde aktif bir şekilde yöneticilere karşı bölge halk-

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larının taleplerini destekleyen bir politika benimsemesi Türkiye'yi hem Rusya, hem de Iran, Irak ve Suriye gibi komşu ülkelerle karşı karşıya getirmiştir. Buna rağmen Türk dış politikası son on yılda bölgede edindiği meşruiyet zeminini korumak için aktif ve tutarlı politikalar üretmeye devam etmelidir. Netice olarak bölgede gelişme ve zenginlik düzeyinin yükselmesi ve demokratik kültürün yerleşmesi hedefleniyorsa bu hedefe hangi model üzerinden ulaşıldığından çok ne kadar hızlı ulaşıldığı önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler
Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika – Arap Baharı – Türk modeli – Ortadoğu siyasi tarihi – Demokratikleşme – Ortadoğu uluslararası ilişkileri

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Связывание Турции с Ближним Востоком и Северной Африкой: «арабская весна» и опыт Турции

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Аннотация

В этой статье на основе анализа исторических динамик народных движений, возникших в начале 2011 года на Ближнем Востоке и Северной Африке и получивших название «арабской весны», рассматривается почему и в какой мере демократический опыт Турции может служить моделью для этих стран. Хотя турецкие власти не признают этого, понятие «турецкой модели» используется и предлагается определенными кругами Запада и Ближнего Востока. В этом контексте в статье утверждается, что турецкий опыт предлагается региону Ближнего Востока и Северной Африки с целью обеспечения контролируемого перехода от авторитарных режимов к демократизации с предотвращением радикальных тенденций в переходный период. Устоявшаяся парламентская система, успешный переход от контролируемой государством и ограниченной элитой экономики к открытой рыночной экономике, французская модель секуляризма являются основными особенностями Турции, которые могут стать источником вдохновения для стран региона. А также успешный и бескровный выход Турции из системы военной опеки и переход к более эффективной демократической системе показал возможность процесса умеренного перехода от авторитарного режима к демократии в регионе. Вместе с этим, в статье утверждается, что не нужно преувеличивать влияние Турции в регионе. Турция, защищающая демократическую культуру и региональную солидарность, на примере Ливии и Сирии увидела, насколько трудно противостоять некоторым глобальным актерам. Использование политики активной поддержки народных требований против властей в процессе «арабской весны» столкнуло Турцию с соседними странами, такими как Россия, Иран, Ирак и Сирия. Но несмотря на это, турецкая внешняя политика для поддержания авторитета в регионе, приобретенного в течении последних десяти лет, должна проводить активную и последовательную политику в регионе. В заключение, если ставится цель повышения уровня развития и процветания в регионе и установление демократической модели, важно не через какую модель, а насколько быстро будет достигнута цель.

Ключевые слова

Ближний Восток и Северная Африка, «арабская весна», турецкая модель, политическая история Ближнего Востока, демократизация, международные отношения на Ближнем Востоке

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