

Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Arab Revolutions

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Abstract

Turkey's foreign policy has been drawing considerable attention particularly because of the momentous transformations in the Middle East. The visits of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davuoglu to Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia in September 2011 and their subsequent visits to the region underscored the rise of Turkey's involvement in the region. The Arab Spring came at a time when Turkey's relations with the United States, Israel and the European Union were going through significant turbulence. 2010 proved to be a particularly difficult year for Turkey's place in the transatlantic community. The Gaza flotilla crisis in June 2010 — ending with Israeli forces killing eight Turkish citizens — and Turkey's "no" vote to a new round of sanctions against Iran at the United Nations (UN) Security Council that same month triggered a heated debate on Turkey's relations with the West, which led popular American columnists such as Tom Friedman to go as far as arguing that Ankara was now joining the " Hamas- Hezbollah-Iran resistance front against Israel." While this was a clear exaggeration, it indicated the scope of debate on the eve of the Arab Spring. Since the Arab Spring, the Western discourse about Turkey has dramatically changed. Instead of asking "who lost Turkey" or complaining about the Islamization of Turkish foreign policy, analysts began discussing whether the new regimes in the Arab world would follow the "Turkish model." This article aims to analyze the Turkish approach to the Middle East and the Arab revolutions, the main determinants of Turkish foreign policy and diplomacy in the Middle East and the debate on "Turkish Model. What has changed, or has not, during and after the Arab Spring?"

Keywords: *Turkish Foreign Policy, Arab Spring, Turkish Model, The Middle East, Diplomacy and New Regional Order*

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Legacy: A Periodization of Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Middle East

In order to locate Turkey's diplomacy to the Middle East, one has to understand the overall change in Turkish foreign policy since 1990's (Ozkan, 2006, 157-185). The end of the Cold War led to fundamental changes in Turkey's foreign policy. Ankara began to exert influence in Central Asia, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Balkans. This was a major shift from Ankara's previous policies of non-involvement. An important shift occurred in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East in this period. During the Cold War years, Turkey preferred non-intervention in the Middle Eastern affairs, but this policy changed dramatically when Turkey assumed a central role in the Gulf War. The Gulf War, coupled with the collapse of the Soviet Union, brought key changes in Turkey's understanding of the Middle East. Turkey started to be much more assertive than before in dealing with the region. However, the last two decades of Turkey's active involvement in the Middle East has been contradictory, if not sometimes has been confusing, if not contradictory. While Turkey supported the Coalition powers in the Gulf crisis in 1991, during the Iraqi War in 2003, Turkey was one of the countries that tried to stop the war. Turkey's unexpectedly fast-growing close relations with the Israel at the end of the 1990s, however, seems to change after 2002, given the fact that Prime Minister Erdogan did not visit Israel until May 2005, and did not give the Israeli Foreign Minister an appointment when he visited Turkey in the same year. Moreover, although Turkey openly threatened to go to war with Syria in 1998, Syrian President Bashar Asad visited Turkey in 2004, the first of its kind in 65 years and then Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer reciprocated this visit in April 2005. Ankara's overall relations with both countries are at worse level now. Conceptually speaking, one can argue that, Turkey's relations with the Middle East since 1990s have been wedged between security and coherence. However, these elements account for relations in general; and there have been three waves of activism in Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East before the Arab spring started. Turkey's current reaction to the Arab revolutions can only be understood within this context.

Pro-Western Wave: 1991 Gulf War and Turgut Ozal

Turkey's active involvement in the Gulf War represented a fundamental alteration of Turkey's traditional "balanced" foreign policy towards the Middle East, a change that continued in the aftermath of the war (Sayari, 1992, 13). The Gulf War, therefore, represented the beginnings of a transformation of Turkey's regional policy on its southern and eastern borders. On 6 August 1990, Turkey closed the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 661 that decided that all states should prevent 'the import to their territories of all commodities and products originating in Iraq'. Turkey's closure of the pipeline and the ending of all regular trade with Iraq was undoubtedly a vital element in the economic campaign against Saddam regime. According to Hale (1992) without Turkish cooperation "any effective embargo would have been quite impossible" (p. 684). Turkey's then-President Turgut Ozal had dominated policymaking on the Gulf War and its implementation since the beginning (Efegil, 2001, 156). As Makavsky (1999) explained, he championed an active foreign policy for Turkey on the crisis and indirectly criticized the basis of traditionalist approach of Turkey to the region. In this regard, President Ozal clearly stated: "it is impossible for Turkey to pursue the hesitant, indecisive policy of waiting for others to make decisions first" (Robins, 1992, 76).

The indirect involvement of Turkey in the Gulf War took two forms. First, the Turkish government gave its permission for the US to use the joint air bases in the southeast of the country, namely the Incirlik base. In so doing, Turkey remained a platform for the US attacks against Iraq for the rest of the conflict. Second, Turkey played a key and extremely important role in the war by tying down a sizeable proportion of the Iraqi army. The Gulf War showed that Turkey is one of the key actors in the Middle East. Indeed it was so even before the Gulf War because of the issues of water, and the Kurdish question. The Gulf War, however, served to reinforce the point. Most importantly, during the Gulf War, certain key principles of Turkey towards the Middle East were set aside. Of the most important one was Turkey's non-interference in intra-Arab disputes and the Middle Eastern affairs (Karaosmanoglu, 2000, 210). Not only did Turkey set aside this main principle, but also the style

of Turkish foreign policy towards the region was changed. The traditional low-key and cautious approaches were replaced by a new confident and high profile style. This policy as mentioned above was mainly promoted and championed by the Prime Minister (1983-1989) and later President (1989-1993) of Turkey, Turgut Ozal. Even after his death, the degree of activism and boldness that Ozal introduced to the Turkish foreign policy was strong (Ataman, 2002, 120-153).

This change in Turkey's regional behavior became distinctive when it began holding meetings with Syria and Iran. The regular tripartite meetings began in November 1992 mainly to discuss major regional issues, particularly the situation in northern Iraq. The main issue that brought the three countries together was the Kurdish issue since the three countries have a large number of Kurds living in their territory. The primary fear of the tripartite states was the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and its repercussions in the region by encouraging the Kurds in their territories to do so. Overall, the legacy of the Gulf War and Ozal in Turkish foreign policy is still considered as an important driving force behind Turkey's active involvement in the Middle East. As shown in following pages, the loss and gains resulting from the Gulf War became a *reference* point for Turkey's involvements in the region. For example, economically, Turkey lost approximately \$60 billion by closing petrol pipeline between Turkey and Iraq. This economic loss alone has had an impact on Turkish policy orientation towards the Middle East as well as vis-à-vis the international community.

The Anti-Western Wave: 1996-1997 the Refah Government and Necmettin Erbakan

The election results of December 24, 1995 shook the Kemalist foundations of Turkey. For the first time since the establishment of the secular Republic of Turkey, a party having an Islamic orientation, Refah (Welfare) Party, won the election. Though it was not able to form a government alone, it secured the majority seats in the Turkish Parliament. In September 1996, Refah Party established a coalition government with the True Path Party. Necmettin Erbakan became the first Islamist prime minister of secularist Turkey. Once Refah got to power, Turkey's foreign

policy inclination towards the Middle East, in particular, and Islamic countries, in general, become persistent.

Refah Party placed emphasis on the development of relations with Turkey's neighbors. In this regard, Refah Party put the improvement of Turkey's relations with its immediate neighbors Syria, Iran and Iraq on its list of priorities. Despite its short period in power (only 11 months), Refah Party was able to increase Ankara's relations with strong Muslim countries radically and even established a grouping among them, the Developing 8 (D-8). This has been the result of an activist foreign policy inclination of Turkey towards the Middle East. The two trips abroad made as Prime Minister by Erdogan, leader of the Welfare Party, was to the Islamic world, where he visited nearly a dozen states, including Iran and Libya. Erdogan's major diplomatic initiative was to establish a grouping of the eight most populous Muslim countries. The D-8 intended to foster economic cooperation as well as political consultations among the Muslim countries (Ozkan, 2011, 112-115).

The AKP Government and Recep Tayyip Erdogan: Beyond Dichotomies

Turkish politics changed dramatically after November 2002, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won enough seats in parliament to form a government. According to Quinn (2004) having created a "political earthquake", it has been the first single party to rule Turkey alone in last 16 years. During this period, Ankara seemed increasingly eager to diversify its foreign policy portfolio while acting independently from the United States. This orientation has been accelerated by the Iraqi war in 2003, which created a disagreement between Turkey and the United States. The Iraqi issue led Turkey to look for alternative of complementing its relationship with the United States.

The March 1, 2003 motion forbidding US troops from using Turkish territory in the war against Iraq was a historical turning point for Turkey's relations with the Middle East. The Turkish parliament prevented the United States from opening a northern front against Iraq on the justification that the international community considered the war illegitimate. Prior to the Iraqi war, Turkey adopted an active diplomacy to minimize problems with neighboring states. More specifically, Turkey

developed its relations significantly with Iran and Syria from commercial and security standpoints. These relations in connection with the Iraqi crises moved Turkey to convene a meeting with all countries bordering Iraq in order to enhance stability in the region and prevent then possible war. While Turkey was not able to prevent the war, its decision not to allow US soldiers to be deployed in southern Turkey has prolonged the process of the Iraqi invasion.

After AKP's assuming power in November 2002, the relations between Turkey and Syria increased dramatically. In July 2003, Syrian President Mohammed Mustafa Miro became the first Syrian prime minister to visit Turkey in 17 years. Three agreements on health, oil and natural gas, and custom matters were signed during his visit to further enhance cooperation between the two countries. At the same time visits at ministerial and technical levels were intensively conducted on a reciprocal basis to further social and economic cooperation. As a sign of improving ties, Turkish companies established 12 investment projects in Syria in 2003, and trade between the two reached the \$3 billion benchmark in 2010. Furthermore, the improvement of relations was culminated in the visit by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in January 2004. This was the first official visit by a Syrian head of state in 57 years. During his visit specific measures were taken to improve relations as well as coordination and consultation on regional issues (Altunisik, 2004, 369).

From 2002 to 2009, Syria and Turkey signed nearly 50 cooperation agreements and conducted their first-ever joint military exercises. In 2010 Syria and Turkey signed a counter-terrorism agreement for a more effective campaign against the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) and Turkey became Syria's largest trading partner. In 2011 the two countries along with Jordan and Lebanon signed the ShamGen agreement for a joint visa that enabled citizens of Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria to travel to any of these countries. The same dramatic increase has also been witnessed in Turkey and Iran relations. It has improved considerably economically and politically. It was at this time period that Turkey's relations with Israel were in transition "from hyperactivity to normal ties." Unlike the mid-1990s, Ankara opted to

play a low-key profile in its relations with Israel beginning in 2002. This has also contributed to the developments of Turkey's relations with Iran rapidly in economic and political arena.

Turkey's relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States and Palestine have also improved. Turkey's refusing to allow the deployment of American troops created an environment in the Middle East in which Turkey was perceived as having returned to its roots – the Middle East. Turkey has developed its relations with the regional organizations, namely Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Turkish candidate for OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu won the election at the 2005 meeting in Istanbul. In 2006, Turkey was invited to the Arab League meetings as a “permanent guest.” The developing relations with the Middle East became even clearer when the OIC invited Turkic Republic of Northern Cyprus as the Turkish Cyprus State to its meetings.

During the AKP period Turkey has diversified its foreign relations – not only with the Middle East, but also with Asia and Africa (Ozkan, 2011, 115-113; Ozkan and Akgun, 2010, 525-546). Stressing that none of the relations is seen as an alternative to another, Turkey is keen on playing a key role in its immediate region and further afield. Assuming the co-chairmanship of Alliance of Civilizations with Spain by the request of the UN Secretary-General in order to develop civilizational harmony, instead of clash, is an indication that Turkey could even represent or speak on behalf of the Middle East in particular, and Islamic world at large. It is easy to identify this wave as being more sophisticated and diversified in comparison to previous ones. Economic, social and cultural relations have intensified and have had a greater impact. In contrast to previous waves, the AKP has added more social and economic dimensions that indicate a different period in Turkey's relations with the Middle East.

Ankara's new diplomacy has also changed the Arab perception on Turkey. In the past, Turkey's image in the Arab world was characterized by its militant secularism, obsessive Westernization, and rejection of its Islamic-Ottoman heritage under the heavy weight of Kemalism. Since the AKP came to power in late 2002, Turkey began moving in a different

direction, namely pro-Islamic, that it was slowly coming to terms with its Muslim identity. It was also modifying its foreign policy along a more strategic and multidimensional line. The AKP's foreign policy has been based on what Prime Minister Erdogan's top foreign policy advisor and now foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu (2001), calls "strategic depth" and "zero-problems" with neighbors. Davutoglu's main argument is that Turkey is a great power that has neglected its historic ties and diplomatic, economic, and political relations with the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and Eurasia, dating back to the Ottoman era. Since Turkey's new-found self-confidence and activism is mostly visible in formerly Ottoman territories, the AKP's foreign policy is sometimes called as "neo-Ottomanism" (Taspinar, 2008).

Turkey managed to improve its relations with all of its neighbors and advocated political integration as well as free flow of goods and services in its neighborhood. This policy achieved concrete results in the form of increased and diversified economic relations, heightened diplomacy and political influence. It led closer coordination with neighbors on issues such as terrorism, mediation in international conflicts, and received a broadly positive response to Turkish foreign policy. In implementing its neighborhood policy, Turkey advocated speaking to all sides, including groups such as the Palestinian movement Hamas. Seen as an honest broker, Turkey mediated between Israel and Syria in 2008, as well as between Iran and the international community in the nuclear issue in 2010 (Kosebalaban, 2010, 36-50; Ozkan, 2011, 26-30). Turkey's diplomatic initiatives were never guaranteed success; but the new Turkish foreign policy was no longer a spectator to regional developments but a serious actor shaping and contributing to various difficult issues.

The Arab Revolutions and Turkish Diplomacy: Toward a New Regional Order

Before the Arab Spring, according to Kalin (2011) Turkey has developed different types of relationships with the countries of the Middle East, targeting improved relations with both governments and the public. Indeed, Turkey is probably the only country that has been able to

promote relations at the two levels in the Arab world without facing too many difficulties. In that sense, one can argue that Turkey's policy of engaging different governments and political groups in the Arab world has contributed to transform the Middle Eastern politics. Turkish officials have stated on various occasions that change in the Arab world is inevitable and must reflect people's legitimate demands for justice, freedom, and prosperity. Moreover, change must occur without violence, and a peaceful transition to a pluralist democracy should be ensured. It was in this context that Turkish diplomacy has responded to the Arab revolutions.

Tunisia and Egypt: Risky, Difficult, but Clear-Cut

Since the beginning of demonstrations in Tunisia in December 2010, Turkey has followed closely the developments in the region to respond correctly and, if possible, guide indirectly towards a right direction that paves the way democratic regimes flourish. When Tunisian Revolution was taking place, Turkey kept a low profile as many states did in the world but indicated that it is ready to help in transformation and voiced that Tunisian leaders should listen to the voice of their people. However, Turkey was forthright in its support for democracy when the revolution spirit reached Cairo's Tahrir Square. Prime Minister Erdogan was the first leader to call for Hosni Mubarak's resignation in a televised speech on Al-Jazeera in February 2011, and President Abdullah Gul was the first head of state to meet with the Egyptian Supreme Council in Egypt after the revolution.

When demonstrations broke out in Egypt, Turkey took a very risky position by asking Hosni Mubarak to leave. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a statement to Turkish Parliament made an emotional appeal to the Egyptian leader, saying "We are all mortal and we must listen to our people." He advised Mubarak to respond to the Egyptian people's demands to change the political regime. And he urged him to step down and establish an interim authority that would drive the country to a "genuine democratic" change. Naturally, Erdogan's call was not received well by the Arab leaders in general and Egyptian leadership in particular. Egypt's then Foreign Minister Ahmad Abul Gheit in a letter to

his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu expressed dismay at Erdogan's advisory and termed it as interference in Egypt's internal affairs: "His (Turkish Premier's) remarks could aggravate our domestic situation." The letter raised the prospects of Egypt-Turkey relations coming under strain but there was not only relief but Ankara also felt vindicated when President Mubarak stepped down on 12 February 2011.

According to Kardas (2011) Erdogan's advice was considered, and somewhat unexpected, by many as a very strong statement given the fact that promotion of democracy has never been a part of Turkey's official discourse, because it has its own problems such as the Kurdish issue that undermine its democracy. But Turkey has made significant strides in terms of democratization since 2002. Therefore, it will be fair to interpret Erdogan's appeal to Mubarak as part of Ankara's increasing self-confidence *vis-à-vis* its democracy. It also signals the broad contours of Turkey's approach to global politics and 'soft' promotion of democracy in the region – wittingly or unwittingly. Erdogan's call for Mubarak to step down was also the first European reaction to developments in Egypt. This was acknowledged and appreciated by the West and also by the people in the Arab world. For example, former prime minister of Belgium and current Liberal Group Chairman in the European Parliament Guy Verhofstadt put the appreciation on record when he said "Erdogan is the only one who told Mubarak that democracy meant change and that it is now time for Mubarak to go". Some commentators even claimed that Erdogan has taught a democracy lesson to Europe.

Turkey showed an outmost interest in developing relations with Egypt after the revolution. Erdogan and Davutoglu visited Cairo various times and the new President of Egypt Mohammed Mursi paid one of his first visits to Turkey. Considering this, Turkey is openly seeking to build a regional partnership with Egypt, with the goal of establishing a new axis of power in the Middle East in the midst of the power vacuum created by the Arab Spring and as the US influence in the region is waning. In an interview with the *New York Times* published on 19 September 2011, Foreign Minister Davutoglu (2011) said: "this will not be an axis against any other country — not Israel, not Iran, not any other

country, but this will be an axis of democracy, real democracy [...] of the two biggest nations in our region, from the north to the south, from the Black Sea down to the Nile Valley in Sudan.” The proposed partnership is to be grounded mostly in economic cooperation at least for now – with an increasingly political outlook. In September 2011, a delegation of Egyptian businessmen visited Turkey. Davutoglu predicted that trade between the two would grow from its current \$3.5 billion to \$5 billion in two years. He also downplays accusations that an alliance might engender rivalry: “some people may think Egypt and Turkey are competing. No. This is our strategic decision. We want a strong Egypt.” Perhaps, as a sign of this, in November 2012, Erdogan visited Egypt with ten ministers and a huge delegation. Both countries did not only sign 27 agreements, but also have established High Level Consultation Mechanism to deepen these relations.

Libya: Diplomacy behind Zigzags and Reality

The developments in Libya have placed Turkey in a piquant situation. More than 25 thousand people from Turkey were living and many Turkish companies were operating especially in construction field in all over the Libya. Understandably therefore, Turkey did not take a strong position against the Libyan leader initially, while it was busy evacuating its citizens from the troubled country. Ankara has advised the Libyan leaders not to use state power against the opposition. In a manner of speaking, Turkish position was in sync with the international community – from China to India and the US, which, in the initial stages, was trying to understand what was going on in the ground.

Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, Turkey did not extend full support to the Libyan opposition until early August 2011 and did not acknowledge the opposition as legitimate representatives. In Libya, Turkey was also initially opposed to NATO’s intervention to enforce a no-fly zone, and had participated exclusively in the humanitarian dimension of the intervention. Turkey also pursued diplomatic efforts to propose a negotiated ceasefire between Muammar Gaddafi and the revolutionaries. When this failed, Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdogan urged Gaddafi to quit and leave the country on May 3, 2011, approximately three months after

protests began in Libya. There were various reasons for Turkey's initial position on Libya; Turkey's good business relations with Muammar Qaddafi's regime before the revolts could be cited as one reason for Turkey's cautious approach to the revolt. Turkish construction companies had secured lucrative contracts in Libya worth \$23 billion and more contracts were to be signed. But it would be unfair to assume that Turkey's sole purpose was to gain financial benefit. Turkey realized the possible danger in the Western agenda that wanted to hijack a popular uprising and use it as a pretext to plunder the vast oil resources of Libya. However, the fact that Turkey confronted by a strong international liberal interventionist discourse, it had some difficulty in explaining itself cogently in its attempt to defend the Libyan people and their interests (Yilmaz, 2011).

After failing to prevent foreign intervention in Libya, Turkey reversed its position and joined the NATO intervention in order to be influential at decision-making process of the intervention and sided fully with the opposition in Libya. Foreign Minister Davutoglu visited three times Bingazhi to foster relations with the opposition and help them in transitional period. Erdogan also visited Libya in September 2010 to show his support and sympathy for the revolution and democracy. Currently, Turkey-Libya relations are very good both at social and state level; and it is likely to develop further in future.

Syria: The Biggest and Ongoing Challenge

Comparing to other revolutions, Syria has been the most complicated and delicate one for Turkish foreign policy, because, Turkey was forced to offer a concrete solution, as the crisis was much closer to home in many ways. According to Yilmaz (2011) Turkey had to consider the crisis in Syria in the context of its close economic relationship with Syria, Sunni-Alawite tensions, democratization, regional balance, and also more urgently the Kurdish question. When the demonstrations broke out in Dera'a, which soon turned into an armed struggle against the Ba'ath regime, Turkey was initially cautious. On 25 May 2011, Davutoglu said that the Syrian President Bashar Asad must win back the hearts of his people through reform, despite the fact that the increasingly-

coordinated opposition groups openly rejected negotiation with a regime willing to shoot civilians. Turkish officials recommended a national anti-corruption campaign and reform of Syria's feared state security and intelligence services. They also urged Asad to undertake a national dialogue inclusive of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which has been brutally suppressed for years. Therefore, Ankara's criticism of Syria was measured and continued to support Asad at the initial stages.

Turkey had several reasons for supporting Asad. First, Syria has taken steps to improve people's freedoms after Bashar Asad inherited the Ba'ath party leadership. He eased political restrictions and introduced a number of economic reforms to improve the country's economy which in return secured him the support of the wealthy Sunni class despite his Alawi background. And he slowly but positively responded to the reform calls. Although protesters regularly come out in the streets of some cities to express dissatisfaction with the ruling Ba'ath regime which has instituted repressive policies and restricted democracy and freedom of the people, a friendly Turkey would be better placed to negotiate between the opposition and the regime to find alternative solutions. Second, Turkey has huge trade interests in Syria as Ankara has become the largest trading partner of Syria. Third is their cooperation against the PKK. Syria hosts a significant proportion of the Kurdish population, some of whom have joined the PKK. Turkish policy makers realize that if Syria is destabilized and turns into another Iraq, it might also become a breeding ground for PKK recruitment. And of course if the violence escalates, a larger refugee influx will hit the Turkish economy.

Considering above-mentioned reasons, Turkey tried to contain the situation in Syria through dialogue. Soon after protests broke out, Turkey sent Hakan Fidan, Head of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) to Damascus twice and on April 7, 2011, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu visited Damascus to pressure Asad for reforms. Asad did introduce some reforms but Ankara was not satisfied and expressed anger at the violent crackdown against the opposition. Turkish policy makers realized that the situation was getting worse and they had to make a decision in the face of increasing pressure from the US and Saudi Arabia.

The first signal about Turkey's changing policy came from Foreign Minister Davutoglu. He conveyed a message to Asad's special envoy in Turkey that Ankara's support "hinges on the willingness of the Syrian government to adopt sweeping reforms in the country." In the meantime, despite the Syrian government's strong displeasure, Turkey hosted a conference in Antalya for Syrian opposition groups between 31 May 2011 and 3 June 2011 with the tacit approval of the Turkish foreign ministry. The delegates who participated in the conference made it clear that they were not interested in negotiations, and that their aim was to topple the regime. And finally, in an interview on Turkish television on 10 June 2011, Erdogan openly distanced himself from Bashar Asad: "I tell you clearly that his brother, Mahir al-Asad, the Head of the Republican Guard, reacts in an inhumane way that can only end in massacre. This concerns the UN Security Council which is already coming to the same conclusion. After all this, Turkey cannot defend Syria." On 16 June 2011, another conference was organized by the Syrian opposition in Istanbul, entitled the National Independence Conference. There were some 350 delegates from various opposition groups that formed a shadow cabinet in preparation to take over from the Ba'ath regime run by the Asad family.

Following a clear change from supporting Asad to a total disengagement from the current regime in Syria, Turkey's Syria policy focused more on a continuation of its long-standing goal of trying to prevent civil war and sectarian conflicts, while preserving its neutral but constructive position (Yilmaz and Ustun, 2011). But as the developments on the ground evolved, Ankara took a strong anti-Asad position and openly declared that he should be removed. Grounded in this thinking, Turkey now acts with international community and the Arab League in its endeavor to bring stability and peace to Syria and stop killings. In coordination with the Arab League, Turkey has announced sanctions for Syria on 30 November 2011. These include a ban on transactions with Syria's government and central bank and measures against prominent businessmen who support the regime. However, Turkey has announced that it will not implement sanctions that directly influence the lives of the Syrian people such as cutting electricity, water and trade. During the time

of writing this article, Syrian issue is still at the center of international and regional attention. What will happen in Syria has direct regional and global repercussions, because it will shape the regional balances and order. Turkey is likely to follow closely the developments in Syria and try to play a constructive role in finding a solution. Eventually, developments in Syria are likely to impact on Turkey more directly than other actors.

Turkish Diplomacy and Debate on “Turkish Model”

As mentioned in the first section, before and soon after the Arab Spring began, Turkey’s popularity had been on the rise in the Arab world. Since the AKP were first elected in 2002, Turkey with its flourishing democracy and rapidly growing economic and military might has become an emerging regional power. This has already created an interest in Turkey from the Middle East. However, it can be argued that Turkey’s foreign policy activism in the Middle East has contributed to the downfall of authoritarian regimes, by implicitly calling for the end of the “Camp David order” and exposing repressive regimes that survived with the help of regional strategic arrangements related to the conflict with Israel (Ozhan, 2011, 58-59). Turkey showed that it is possible to be democratic, have good relations with the West, and still stand up to unjust Israeli policies. Its “dignified” stance was strengthened after the incident at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in 2009 in which Erdogan stormed out of a discussion with Israeli President Shimon Peres about Israel’s war in Gaza. Erdogan’s gesture, widely acclaimed on the Arab street, exposed and undermined Arab leaders who had acquiesced to Israeli policies and committed to the status quo. Turkey’s stance has had a significant political impact across the Arab world.

The fact that Turkey has succeeded in staging a soft revolution against the once powerful autocracy at home has been very important in Arab view of Turkey. Economic and political achievements made Turkey a good candidate as a “role model” to replace the despotic Arab regimes. At the time, members of strong opposition groups such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Tunisian Islamic movement Hizb al-Nahdah, as well as the masses, did not hide their sympathy for the

Turkish model. Indeed, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan captured the moment by extending his strong support to Egyptian and Tunisian revolutionaries, warning Arabian leaders that they should swiftly implement reforms and meet the democratic demands of their people.

It is interesting to note here that Turkey has never presented itself as a model to the Arab world. Mostly the Arab media, civil society and opposition groups in the Arab world have presented Turkey as a model to the Arab world. This has intensified once these actors have become a key player in the new Middle East after the revolutions. Nevertheless, the debate on “Turkish Model” is not limited to newly emerging actors in the Arab world, but also has been discussed and promoted by the West. For example, Britain's former Prime Minister Tony Blair said that democratic Turkey is a role model for Arab Spring countries. The Western interest in the Turkish model seems to be particularly driven by satisfaction with the fact that Turkey has been able to achieve a true and lasting reconciliation between Islam and democracy, on one hand, and between Islam and the West, on the other. It has also managed to realistically address the problems of minorities and religious freedom. The West seems enthusiastic about this model and hopes it can be seen as a model by the Arab revolutionaries seeking to establish democracy.

Nevertheless, it is our contention that Turkish model should be analyzed beyond the classical approaches. The most important “modelhood”, if there is one, is related to the way Ankara positions itself in global politics and approaches issues. For example, Egyptian political scientist Hassan Nafaa (2011) argues that “Turkey’s foreign policy obviously provides Egypt with a model of how a country can, despite being allied with the West, adopt an independent policy consistent with its national interests. This has been one of the most important lessons learned in the Arab world thus far from the Turkish model” (p. 44). Undoubtedly, changes in the Middle East opened a debate whether Turkey could be a model for newly emerging regimes. As mentioned, there is an immense interest whether or not Turkey is a model. Conceptually speaking, Islamists, the West and Arab streets see merit in the Turkish model for a variety of different reasons. Islamists see the

example of AKP as a way of coming to power through elections, while the West sees Turkey as a successful mix of Islam and democracy, modernization and secularism. For the people in the Arab streets Turkey is a model of economic development, dignity, job creation, public service and welfare (Duran and Yilmaz, 2011). Whatever are the reasons for proposing Turkey as a model, the fact remains that Turkey is an inspiration in building the new Arab world. So, it is obvious that in the days ahead importance of Turkey will increase in the region. Diversity of perspectives on Turkey also indicates the multiple facets of Turkish model, and it is a real indication of Turkey's own complexity both at domestic and international levels.

Despite its conservative roots, even after more than 10 years in office, the AKP continues to appeal to a much wider electorate including more secular middle class elements in the Turkish society and this is what makes it an attractive case study. Perhaps, that is why the importance and success of the AKP has also implications beyond the Middle East. In almost every third world countries and in the Muslim world in particular, there exists a center who dominates the power and a periphery that actually deprived of power and decision-making. For example in the Middle East, there is a distinctive division between the ruling elite and the public. What is striking is that due to lack of democracy and mostly the power transfer being held between family members, the excluded majorities has no way to channel their voices to the top. So far, the AKP has been the only successful experience in the Middle East that brought the periphery to the center without alienating or clashing directly with the center. This itself represent a major breakthrough given the existing literature's emphasis that Islam and democracy is incompatible. The AKP example shows that both can co-exist peacefully with an increasing legitimacy from the public (Cevik, 2011, 121-144). In that sense, the AKP can be seen as a model in a way that it has consolidated Turkey's historical domestic divide between center and periphery.

Considering that each society has different historical, institutional and structural settings in its political arena, the AKP experience in Turkey cannot be copied, but can be taken as an inspiring model in the

third world in general and the Middle East in particular. As the leaders behind AKP experience made explicit as early as in 2003 and later years frequently, Turkey does not want to be a model to any country, but drawing lessons and being “a source of inspiration” in “finding their own solutions to their own problems” are as normal as historical events.

Conclusion

Arab revolutions have not ended yet and it will take time to settle their transition. Revolutions are still in process, most importantly in Syria. Turkish diplomacy and foreign policy will also evolve and transform itself as the time goes. What will underline Turkish approach to developments are stability, transition from within and regional ownership for revolutions. However, Turkey’s outmost interest will be to define a new regional order based on regional sensitivities and interests. In that sense, the success or the failure of revolutions will also directly influence Turkish policy toward the region.

Needless to say, the Arab revolutions have presented the Middle East with a historic opportunity for a more democratic and dignified future. While the transition in Libya and Tunisia are important, Egypt’s evolution into a stable democracy will be crucial for the structural transformation of the region. If the new Egypt seizes this opportunity without reverting to a pseudo-democracy for piecemeal strategic arrangements, the prospect of the emergence of a new regional order that Turkey wants may turn into reality. The greatest challenge for Turkey during this period is to help create the new language and terms of discourse. Turkey must not watch but manage this process whenever it can, as it did during the uprisings in Egypt, Libya, and Syria. If Turkey can remain involved and relevant in the medium term, then it may help the Arab momentum to create a truly new regional order.

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