

Turkish Democracy: A Model for the Arab World

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Abstract

In retrospect, the 'Arab Spring' has brought dramatic and significant social changes in many countries in the Middle East. In stark contrast to the Arab uprisings, the changes and transformation that have taken place in the political landscape in Turkey were more peaceful and less damaging to the society. The two scenarios warrant for a diagnostic investigation to identify the underlying reasons as to why the Turkish transformation happened peacefully, without any bloodshed, compared to the Arab world. The resistance movement in the Arab world was prepared to take the democratic and secular state of Turkey as a model in their demand for a change in their own countries. The people in the Arab world also witnessed the overwhelming support enjoyed by the conservatives of the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Very precisely, this paper intends to scrutinize the role of Turkey in giving the inspiration for the Arab uprising, analyze the declaration of the leaders and the people's opinions stated in the print and electronic media with regard to the uprising. The overall analysis of this paper will make inferences to Turkey as an exemplary democratic country for the Arab world.

Keywords: Turkish Democracy, Election, Model, Muslim Countries

Abstrak

Apabila ditinjau kembali, 'Spring Arab' telah membawa perubahan sosial yang dramatik dan signifikan di banyak negara di Timur Tengah. Berbeza dengan kebangkitan orang Arab, perubahan dan transformasi yang telah berlaku di landskap politik Turki yang lebih aman dan kurang kerosakkan kepada masyarakat. Mengambil kira

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kedua-dua senario, waran untuk penyiasatan diagnostik untuk mengenal-pasti sebab-sebab mengapa transformasi Turki berlaku secara aman, tanpa pertumpuhan darah apa-apa, berbanding dengan dunia Arab. Pergerakan resisten di dunia Arab telah bersedia untuk mengambil negara demokratik dan sekular Turki sebagai model dalam permintaan mereka untuk perubahan dalam negara mereka sendiri. Orang-orang di dunia Arab turut menyaksikan sokongan berpadu yang dinikmati oleh konservatif Party AK (Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan) yang diketua oleh Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Secara tepat, karya ini berniat untuk meneliti peranan Turki dalam memberi inspirasi untuk kebangkitan Arab, menganalisis pengisytiharan pemimpin-pemimpin dan pendapat orang-orang yang dinyatakan dalam media cetak elektronik mengenai kebangkitan. Analisis keseluruhan karya ini akan membuat kesimpulan ke Turki sebagai contoh negara demokrasi bagi dunia Arab.

Kata Kunci: Demokrasi Turki, Pilihan Raya, Model, Negara-negara Islam

Introduction

Nowadays, in the international system, perhaps, one of the most debated topics is the uprising in the Arab world. Basically the outcome of this massive change brought by the resistance movement can be attributed to many factors. Among the internal factors are: the demand for freedom by the people, the prevalence of corruption in many Arab countries, the economic problem, the existence of the middle class that wants to see transformation, oppressive regimes, the clandestine involvement of the West and Israel in the administration of these countries. As for the external factors: the advancement that has taken place in the area of information technology, particularly in the social media, the availability of the communication facilities, the recent development in the international legal system, new paradigm and axis shift in the balance of power in the world, and the globalization phenomenon can all be the contributory factors in one way or another.

However, the matter that we would like to dwell here is the Turkey's role as an external factor in the region. It could be said that the most significant factor in the recent development that we see in the Arab world is the "Turkish Influence".

Turkey's role can be seen as an obvious inspirational factor in providing the practical experience for change and transformation towards democracy, freedom and human rights in the Arab world. Emulating the Turkish experience, the Arab people put forward their demand to their rulers for change and transformation. Their demand was to see some changes in the areas of economy, politics, social, fundamental rights and freedoms. The rationale for their demand was, if Turkey was able to bring about the changes without the prosperity of oil revenue, then why their governments cannot do the necessary changes with the advantage of the wealth that is generated through the oil fields.

Turkey, in many ways, is different from other Muslim countries. Among the differences are, its adoption of a secular system, made its proclamation as a Republic and later became democratic since the 1950s. It has continued on with these changes in spite of the four military interferences in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. In addition, to create a strong economy without having natural resources is another indicator of its power. Supplementary to that, Turkey is among the Western defence system and has been negotiating full membership for the European Union. While this has been worked out, it tries to bind a good relationship with other Muslim countries. The 2002 election saw the dawn of a new era in the Turkish politics. The birth of the new millennium also ushered the Turkish people into electing the current AK Islamic party to form the government. Democratic values and practices infused in its system of governance have brought significant effects in the lives of the Turkish people. Turkey is now seen at the new star in the new horizon of the Muslims. Turkey's new position as caught the attention of many in the Arab world. The demonstrators in the Arab countries are demanding from their rulers the likeness they see in Turkey, in terms of its democracy, election, freedom of expression and human rights. Within this framework and development, Turkey has emerged as a model for many countries in the Arab world.¹

¹ Abdulkadir Baharçipek, "Arap Dünyasındaki Değişimin Anlamı" *Journal of Individual & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2011), p. 23-36.

Turkey's Journey to Democracy

The democratisation process in Turkey took more than two hundred years, which goes back to the beginning of 19th century. The efforts to establish democratic system began with the *Sanad-i Ittifaq* (29 September 1808), continued with the proclamation of *Kanun-i Asasi* (23 December 1876) and with the proclamation as a Republic on 29th October 1923 when it was finally known as Turkish Republic. The proclamation as a republic demanded for a new constitution since the 1921 Constitution was not a constitution in the actual sense as it did not comprehensively explain matters related to the state. Rather it was a draft document dealing with the most urgent matters of the state.² Although the 1921 Constitution was a very important step for Turkish constitutional history since it was the first constitution that proclaimed the principle of 'national sovereignty' naming itself as the 'only and true representative of the nation transferring the Executive and Legislative powers to the Assembly. With the proclamation of a new Constitution in April 1924 after the abolition of the Caliphate in March 1924 the Turkish state throughout the following years became more and more secular. Furthermore, the power of Sufi orders and lodges were closed in 1925. Turkey's oldest political party; the People's Party is a centre-left Kemalist political party which was founded during the Congress of Sivas as a union of resistance group against the invasion of Anatolia on September 7, 1919. This party officially declared itself as a political organization in October 29, 1923. In November 10, 1924 this party was renamed as the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk partisi [CHP]), which currently is the main opposition in the Grand National Assembly in Turkey. It existed as a single party until 1946, despite two attempts made by the opposition to cause a split: the first one was the Progressive Republican Party (Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası) established in October 17, 1924 by some famous generals such as Kazım Karabekir and Ali Fuat Cebesoy and the second one was the Free Republican Party (Serbest

² Ergun Özbudun, "Constitutional Law", in Introduction to Turkish law edited by T. Ansary and D. Wallace, 5th edition, (Ankara: Turhan Kitabevi, 2005), p. 21.

Cumhuriyet Fırkası) founded by Atatürk's friend Ali Fethi Bey (Ali Fethi Okyar) in August 1930 in order to reduce the tension of the people against the Progressive Republican Party. However these two parties were banned within a few months of their establishment by the "single-party state".³ Although the Free Republican Party succeeded all around the country and therefore all the opposition people coalesced against the secular regime, the ruling authorities immediately alarmed to dissolve the party on November 17, 1930.⁴ No further attempt at a multi-party democratic system was made until the establishment of the National Development Party (Milli Kalkınma Partisi) founded by Nuri Demirağ, in 1945.

For a while the new Republic of Turkey struggled against the opponents of the reformers, and after 1945, the proclamation of democracy became tremendously popular. As a result of this situation Muslims found themselves in the place of an opponent against the secular state. In Feroz Ahmad's observation, such a situation brought the Muslims to a state of being denied of their freedom and their rights violated.⁵ On the 27th May 1960 military coup saw the overthrow of the Menderes government, Turkey already had experienced transformations in the many fields of life: from economical transformation to the political transformation. The new constitution in 1961 carried out the political transformation. It was a military coup that ousted the government of the Democratic Party in May 27, 1960.⁶

Following the industrialization movement started in 1960, Necmeddin Erbakan in 1969 appeared in the political arena of Turkey as someone representing the call for Turkey to become an industrialized nation. When he was elected as an independent member of parliament for Konya in 1969, Erbakan started criticizing the Western ideology and hegemony over the Muslim nations, especially in Turkey. He guaranteed 'the rights and freedoms of man...as well as internal peace within a democratic

³ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_People%27s_Party_\(Turkey\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_People%27s_Party_(Turkey))

⁴ Feroz Ahmad, "Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 27, No. 1, (Jan., 1991), pp. 3-21, p. 6.

⁵ Feroz Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ Rona Aybay, "Some Contemporary Constitutional Problems in Turkey", *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, vol. 4, No. 1, (1977), pp. 21-27 published by Taylor & Francis, Ltd., p. 21.

regime-based on a moral outlook that postulates the need for a virtuous society'.⁷ Unfortunately when the results were announced, the 12th September 1980 military coup overtook the running of the country. When that happened all the initiative done by the Islamic movement and all other political parties came to a halt, sending Turkey into another period of darkness.⁸ As a consequence of this development took Turkey into a new level of consciousness in its demand for democracy. Accordingly, the National Security Council, from its early days of formation, openly announced that they will restore the democratic system. The function of the National Security Council was to prepare a new Constitution, draft law on political parties, electoral law, and as well as to perform normal legislative functions such as making amendments, or abolishing laws. Constituent Assembly was lawfully approved on 30 June 1981. The Constituent Assembly consisted of 160 members of Consultative Assembly and the National Security Council.⁹

The Constitution of 1982 just like the Constitution of 1961 which was made on the ground of the same reason as a reaction to the severe problems occurred in the functioning of the previous Constitution, and finally as it is indicated in Article 2 in the Constitution the fundamental principles of the Republic are Atatürk Nationalism, Democratic state, Human rights, Secularism, Social State, The rule of law (hukuk devleti).¹⁰

Elections in the Last Decade

The Republic of Turkey has experienced electoral practices in various stages since the proclamation of the republic in 1923. However, the political transformation of Turkey especially in the last decade was quite unique compared to the previous elections. According to one of the latest investigation “the

⁷ Binnaz Toprak, “*Islam and Political Development in Turkey*”, (Leiden: 1981), pp. 96-104, quoted from Feroz Ahmad, “Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, (Jan., 1991), pp. 3-21 published by Taylor & Francis, Ltd., p. 15.

⁸ Feroz Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 9- 19.

⁹ Ergun Özbudun, *ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰ See more about these principles: Ergun Özbudun, *ibid.*, pp. 28-34.

transformation took place on various fronts and in different forms. For instance, the parties represented in the Turkish parliament of 1999 were all ousted in the 2002 elections. Since 2002, there has been a single party government with relatively successful governance on almost all fronts, including the economy, foreign affairs, and infrastructure development. And, what is more surprising and striking is that this single political party, AKP (Justice and Development Party), has been increasing its votes in every election it entered since its inception in 2002, including the very recent parliamentary elections on June 12, 2011. Furthermore, liberalizing changes in the constitution and laws regarding, for example, the role of the military and public perception in and outside of Turkey are seen as only the beginning for Turkey's fundamental changes in the areas of freedom, entrepreneurship, innovation, public services, and advancement in all aspects of modern life. For the first time since its establishment in 1923, the citizens of the Republic of Turkey felt the diminishing grip of the army in their life. As a consequence of the 2011 Elections, which resulted in a large (95%) representation of all types of voters in the parliament, it is now possible to envision that a new, democratic, and civilian constitution can be formulated by the people for the people."¹¹

Ten Percent Threshold in Elections

With Turgut Dzal's political ability, the 10% electoral threshold entered in the Turkish political life in the November 6, 1983 election. The threshold has been playing a significant role to form a parliamentary union in the Assembly. Small groups of the society would be represented at the parliament with joining a big group rather than being ignored totally. As this system is aimed at creating an atmosphere of pluralism, although it is a contentious system among the political parties, it is appreciated by the majority in order to provide stability and continuity of the integrity of the parliament.

¹¹ Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Moğulkoç, Muammer Koç, "A Quantitative Analysis of Turkey's 2011 Elections," *Insight Turkey* Vol. 13 / No. 4 / 2011, pp. 189-198, p. 190.

In that respect, if the latest election of 12 June 2011 is analyzed we could see that, according to a research done, “the 2011 election produced a parliament whereby 95% of Turkish voters are represented, quite a high percentage compared to previous elections in Turkey as well as in other countries. This was 55% in the 2002 and 87% in the 2007 elections. Related to such a high representation aspect of the 2011 elections, another important question emerged: If there had not been a 10% threshold in the Turkish electoral system, would the results have been any different in the 2011 elections? We should remember that the 10% threshold significantly affected the parties represented in the parliament and the distribution of the seats between them in the previous elections.”¹² The research result indicates that “the percentage of votes went up for the AKP and the CHP from 2002 to the 2007 elections; however, the number of deputies for each party decreased. This was because the MHP fell under the threshold and could not enter the parliament in the 2002 elections.”¹³ As the research indicates that the researchers have used the [D’Hondt system] in order to allocate seats among the parties based on the votes they received. Finally, we see that although the 10% threshold did not have any significant impact on the 2011 elections, it had a significant impact on the previous elections. The following result confirms it as “the AKP’s share of votes rose from 34% in 2002 to 47% in 2007 and 50% in the 2011 elections. However, the number of AKP deputies fell from the 2002 to the 2011 elections.”¹⁴

Electoral Game

Electoral game means whether the Supreme Election Council has any role determining the members of parliament in elections. It must have encountered various games in elections as in all matters. Therefore, much concern has to be given to the game of the Supreme Election Board as much as to the ballot boxes. Result of an election could be against you by making

¹² Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Moğulkoç, Muammer Koç, *ibid.*, p. 194.

¹³ Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Moğulkoç, Muammer Koç, *ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁴ Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Moğulkoç, Muammer Koç, *ibid.*, p. 194-195.

some sensitive changes. Despite having the majority of the votes you may not have the right to represent the majority.

The research also enlightened this point referring to the last election held in 2011. “We also asked a significant question: whether or not a party losing (or winning) a seat in any province is due to the expression of popular preference, that is, to the changes in the voting shares of that party or due to the changes made by the Supreme Board of Elections (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu) on March 1, 2011 concerning the maximum total number of seats for each province. This change was made to allocate the seats among the provinces with respect to their current populations.”¹⁵

The impact of YSK changes on the 2011 election is obvious with the result of the following research. It is explained that the main opposition party CHP (Republican People’s Party) got better result than AKP (Justice and Development Party) when the changes were made. In fact, it is said that the changes were intentionally made in favour of the CHP whose perception and orientation is secular in nature. “The CHP increased its votes in 10 provinces by at least 10 percent (Kırklareli, Tekirdağ, Edirne, Aydın, Muğla, Eskişehir, Zonguldak and Tunceli). Some of these provinces have been for long, the strongholds of the CHP since the 1950 elections, such as Tekirdağ, Edirne and Kırklareli. On the other hand, the AKP increased its votes by more than 10% in only three provinces (Sinop, Rize and Elazığ). The win in the Rize province was apparently due to the fact that it is the leader’s hometown. It is also important to evaluate the significant decrease of votes to understand the performances of all the parties. The AKP votes decreased in Ağrı, Hakkari, Mardin and Van by at least 10 percent, while none of the other parties experienced a loss of their votes in any of the provinces by a margin as large as 10 percent.”¹⁶ In conclusion, they have finalized the research that “the impact of the YSK change on the distribution of the seats between the parties was significant, but not vital. Our calculations showed that if there were no YSK changes in the 2011 elections, the AKP would have obtained 332 seats instead of 326, the CHP would have 130 seats

¹⁵ Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Moğulkoç, Muammer Koç, *ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁶ Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Moğulkoç, Muammer Koç, *ibid.*, p. 196.

instead of 135, the MHP would have 55 seats instead of 53, and the independents would have 33 seats instead of 36.”¹⁷

In Need of a Strong Centralized Party

The Republic of Turkey since its establishment conducted 23 general elections, 10 by-elections, 18 presidential elections. Some of the general elections went through difficulty in forming a government after the election results were declared. The main reason for this is due to the failure in implementing the 10% electoral threshold. It has been also observed that governments, which were formed by several parties or even two parties, collapsed easily after a very short period of time and this situation called for another round of election. Therefore, short-term governments caused many damages to the country both politically and economically. In that respect, a strong centralized party would be a better choice for the betterment of the nation state.

For example, when we consider the elections held “since 1950, it can be stated that whenever a strong center-right party was formed (the DP in the 1950s, AP in 1965, ANAP in the 1980s and AKP in the 2000s), it comfortably won the election winning the majority of seats in the parliament, and establishing a single-party government, which, indeed, resulted in stable economic growth, security and an increase in its perceived strength inside and outside of the country. Last decades (such as the 1970s and 1990s) had witnessed poor election results that have all resulted in the formation of weak governments (coalitions) due to the fragmentation of the political spectrum, which particularly affected center-right, and to some degree, center-left parties (i.e., AP vs. MSP vs. MHP in the 1970s and ANAP vs. DYP in the 1990s). Strong center-right parties and the governments they formed all the resulted in producing charismatic leaderships (Menderes in the 1950s, Demirel in 1965, Dzal in the 1980s and Erdođan in the 2000s), which faded away every decade with the disappearance of the leaders from active political life. However, for a strong democracy and sustainable development, leadership should be supported by democratic institutions and culture.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Mođulkoç, Muammer Koç, *ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁸ Vural Aksakalli, Hatice Tekiner-Mođulkoç, Muammer Koç, *ibid.*, p. 197.

Turkish Model of Islam and Democracy

Turkey is emerging as a successful model for an Islamic democracy, even if the idea of Muslim and Islamic democracy is a controversial concept¹⁹, especially since the last decade. The Islamic movements in both Tunisia and Egypt have referred Turkey as their future model for democracy. In the last few years, Turkey has shown significant improvement in economy, commitments to democracy and human rights, and its continued effort to join the European Union. Despite the reluctance of the European countries, Turkey is still struggling to be accepted as part of the larger European community. Even though it faces a stalemate in dealing with the Europeans, this has not deterred it from having good social and economic ties with Asia, Africa, and Latin American countries. It enjoys good military cooperation with China. In Africa, it binds good partnership in business with countries like Sudan, Tanzania, and Iraq. Turkey is respected for its bold and outspoken foreign policy and its key role as a mediator resolving conflicts in its neighbourhood. Despite of the worldwide economic recession, the Turkish economy shows a steady growth bringing prosperity to its people. In recent times, Arabs attention towards Turkey has increased dramatically through the efforts done by Turkish media, especially the television programs. Many see the Turkish media as the bridge maker between Turkey and Arabia. Erdogan's anti-Israeli rhetoric and vehement condemnations of Israel have also increased his popularity in the Muslim world, particularly in the Arab world. The efforts done by AK Party has shown that it is possible to be both Muslim and democratic at the same time.²⁰ After all, the spirit of democracy is very much in line with the Islamic spirit and principles stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Change in Arab Perception towards Turkey

Many reasons can be attributed to the change of perception of the Arabs towards Turkey. This change of perception is seen as a

¹⁹ Kadri Gürsel, "Who Really Wants a Muslim Democracy," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1, (May 27, 2011), p. 93-97.

²⁰ Ayse Kadayifci and Peter Weinberger, "Egypt on Fire," *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, Issue Brief no.2. p. 2.

positive thing by the Turkish people. Many decades ago, Turkey was not well received in the Arab world for the reason that Kamal Atatürk had an anti-Arab and secularist approach in managing Turkey. In the latest development, Turkey's new regional foreign policy of 'zero-problems' allowed Turkey to eradicate any historical and political problems occurred in the past with its neighbours, the Arab world and the Muslim world at large. The Turkish economic model of high productivity based on the export-oriented growth, and the apparent success of the Turkish democracy is seen appealing to many of its neighbours who apply the authoritarian regime to oppress and suppress their citizens. Likewise Turkey has been applauded for its approach in striking a balance between what is spiritual and mundane, and also for its religious tolerance. In comparison to the Turkish approach, the region around it has not witnessed a stable coexistence among the many different types of people residing in those countries.

The other aspects that raised Turkey's popularity among Arab countries were its strong stand taken by its parliament against the use of air base for the invasion of Iraq by the American troop in 2003, Prime Minister Erdoğan's reproach to Israel during the Gaza war of December-January 2008-2009, as well as the 'one minute' challenge in the world economic forum and last to state is the protest against the Israel's attack on aid mission sent to Gaza through peace activists boarded the 'Gaza Aid Flotilla'(Mavi Marmara) in May 2010.²¹

An interesting survey was conducted by Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Tesev) between August-September 2010 to find out the perception of the Arabs towards Turkey. This timely survey was conducted a few weeks after the Turkish condemnation on Israel creating problem of itself and others in the Middle East. Salem said, "It would be interesting to see what results would be if the survey were conducted today, after the events of the Arab spring, and particularly after such dramatic events have taken place in Egypt and Libya. With regard to Egypt, Prime Minister Erdoğan was one of the first world leaders to express sympathy for the protestors and among the first to urge President Mubarak to step down. President Gül was the first leader

²¹ Paul Salem, "Turkey's Image in the Arab World," TESEV Foreign Policy Programme, (Istanbul: Yelken Basim, 2011), p. 1-8.

to visit post-Mubarak Egypt. These forthright positions favour the process of democratization, and the peoples' rights were very positively received the Arab public opinion."²² The result of the survey made by TESEV was a significant contribution in forming positive public opinion on Turkey in many Arab countries. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents indicated that there should be greater cooperation and collaboration between Turkey and the Arab world. They also believed that through such cooperation both parties will benefit economically which will in turn make the countries in the Middle East more stable.

The survey also highlighted the fact that 66% of the respondents believed that Turkey can be a good role-model country for the Middle East. Their reason for having such a thought was based on Turkey's Muslim background, its economic strength, for its democratic rule, for its approach in striking a balance between what is worldly and religious, and lastly for its spirit shown towards Islamic principles in running of the country.

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan became the most admired leader in the Muslim world since his coming into power with his AK Party. Recently, Rachid Ghannouchi of the An-Nahda Islamic party in Tunisia said that Turkey is a model for democracy and has been a model for his movement. He said that Turkey is a model country for Tunisia in terms of democracy. He also indicated that both these countries enjoy good relations and hope that this sort of relation can be strengthened and maintained.²³ He has compared his party with that of the Turkey's ruling AK Party than to other Middle Eastern movements, like Egypt's banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Fatwa Gerges, professor of Middle Eastern politics and international relations at the London School of Economics, stressed by saying that there is nothing else; the only effective, working model in the Middle East is the Turkish model. In his opinion he thinks that the Turkish model serves as a foundation for similar societies in the region. In addition to that, he thinks that in the wake of the protest and demonstration going on, Arabs should take a

²² Paul Salem, *ibid.*, p. 2.

²³ Hurriyet Daily News, "Ennahda takes Turkey as model for democracy," <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=ennahda-takes-turkey-as-model-for-democracy-democracy-2011-10-27> accessed 5 November 2011.

second look at the Turkish model that marries Islamic values and democracy as a universal form of government.²⁴ On the contrary, many other analysts cautioned that there are profound differences between Turkey and Arab in terms of Turkey's partnership with NATO and the process of European Union candidacy which reflect a moderate brand of Islam that may not be willingly adopted by the countries in the Middle East that lack the culture of political freedom.

Fadi Hakura, associate professor at London's Chatham House think tank, expressed that there is no question Turkey's example can be an inspiration to Tunisia or Egypt, but if any Arab country would take Turkey as a model it would take decades for it to emulate Turkey's political and economic development. The powerful military of Turkey has ousted four governments since 1960, and has acted as a final authority of power in a parliamentary system that has prevailed since the 1950s, however, "this was not the case in Egypt, where the military has been at the heart of power since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952, said Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Endowment's Middle East Centre in Beirut."²⁵

Turkey's AK Party emerged from a banned Islamist movement to become a moderate party since 2002 elections which was seen as a triumph for a strain of political Islam centred on promoting Muslim values democratically rather than imposing strict Islamic law which also favours both the western mind and Muslim intellectuals. As Lorenzo Vidino, an expert on the Muslim Brotherhood at the RAND Corporation, said the Turkish experience was the best case scenario for an Islamist movement when forming a government in Egypt, however the Muslim Brotherhood has not undergone the evolution, and the generational change has not taken place in the Muslim Brotherhood where there is a struggle between the old school and the second generation Islamist that took place in Turkey. On the other hand, Turkey's tradition of secularism since Mustafa Kamel Ataturk founded

²⁴Jon Hemming, in <http://www.reuters.mobi/article/article/idUSTRE7116P120110202> accessed 11 November 2011.

²⁵Jon Hemming, *ibid.*

modern Turkey in 1923 to mean that the Turks are more wedded to the separation of state and religion.²⁶

President Barack Obama's call to Erdogan with regards to the turmoil in Egypt is highly significant. He believes that Turkey has vital role in the region as represented by an elected leader.²⁷ In Libya, Erdogan's visit became a symbol of unity of Turks and Arabs as the prayer leader Salem al-Sheikhi told the crowd of several thousand in Tripoli's Martyrs' Square "Our hands are clasped with those of the Turkish people," he thanked him for his help by saying "after we thank God, we thank our friend Mr. Erdogan, and after him all the Turkish people," he stressed that they will never forget Turkish people: "We will never forget what you did for us."

Although Erdogan's message of secular democracy may not be welcomed by the Middle East Muslim brotherhood, it has shaken the static thinking among the intellectuals, and at the same time it was welcomed by the US. Furthermore, Erdogan's call at an Arab League meeting in Cairo on Palestine to be a symbol of peace will be echoed soon all around the world, "Let's raise the Palestinian flag and let that flag to be the symbol of peace and justice in the Middle East" He uttered these words after Turkey cut its ties with its former ally, Israel, asking the Israeli ambassador to leave, ending military cooperation, and vowing to step up naval patrols in the eastern Mediterranean.²⁸

Since the majority of the Arab leaders have been clinging on to their power, the political culture in the Arab world has traditionally reflected an authoritarian and patriarchal nature. Therefore, an alternative trend in the power play is expected to bring major changes in the state of mind, work culture and even in the economic status of the people in the Arab society.

Previous attempt to bring a democratic system into practice was not a successful thing in many of the countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Much of the failure to introduce democratic system were mainly attributed to the lack of consensus among the

²⁶Jon Hemming, *ibid.*

²⁷Jon Hemming, *ibid.*

²⁸ *Alexander Christie-Miller*, "Erdogan pitches Turkey's democratic model on 'Arab Spring' tour" *Christian Science Monitor*, September 16, 2011, <http://news.yahoo.com/erdogan-pitches-turkeys-democratic-model-arab-spring-tour-184715553.html> accessed 04 November 2011.

members of the ruling majority and the opposition parties in their will to go for democratic rule, eradication of economic and social stagnation, and sometimes due to the poor performance by the political parties that promote democratic way of governance.

However we cannot say that democratic transition is impossible in the Arab countries only because the society is not ready yet. Tunisia can be taken as an example for that matter. The Islamic Ennahda party has declared that they are ready to cooperate with secular parties in forming the government. As the party's founder, Rashid Ghannouchi, has repeatedly voiced support for the Turkish model as a basis for the further development of the Arab countries. As the Freedom and Justice Party of Egypt was established by the Muslim Brotherhood by declaring its formula for a "Islamic democracy", it stated that it will be the best alternative for the upcoming parliamentary elections. Since all the regional problems reflect issues on economy and politics, this gives Turkey exceptional opportunities to claim the role of a new regional leader. Ever since the start of the 'Arab Spring' politicians, intellectuals and policy makers repeatedly kept on asking the question whether Turkey can be a model for Arab countries or not as an alternative democracy to the Western-style of democracy.²⁹

Commencing the Arab Spring

The awakening in the Arab world which the West called it the "Arab Spring" began with the demonstrations that took place after the death of Mohamed Bouazizi who set himself on fire on the 17th December 2010, as a sign of protest against the rampant corruption and the humiliating treatment he had received from the Tunisian municipal authority. Moved by the death of Bouazizi, the demonstration and protest against authoritarian government in Arab world spread like 'wildfire' across North Africa and the Middle

²⁹ Zhanna Igoshyna, "Democratic transition 'not impossible' in Arab world," November 01, 2011, <http://news.az/articles/politics/47924> accessed 02 November 2011.

East: going into Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, Morocco, and Jordan.³⁰

The protest and demonstration that took place in the Arab countries represent a significant and continuous challenge against autocratic rule in the Middle East. The unexpected protest has overthrown authoritarian leaders, like former Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and in the near future expected to bring down other corrupt government as well. As a result of the ‘Arab Spring’ many leaders have lost much of their autocratic power in managing their subjects.³¹ Scholars have argued that democracy has to be a self-enforcing equilibrium of the strategic interactions between a country’s key political players rather than arguing that democratization has cultural or structural bases.³²

How and Why the Arab Spring Started

The success of the Tunisians people in going against the corrupt practices in their country gave the impetus and inspiration for the masses in many countries in the Middle East to demand for a change in their own political system. In Egypt, the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak proved that his people were no longer interested in his undemocratic ways of managing the country. Besides the undemocratic system, elsewhere in the Arab world of today, social inequality, unemployment, communal violence, oppressive regimes are some of the causes that call for the unrelenting protest in the Middle East. The popular uprisings

³⁰ Aigerim Zikibayeva, “What Does the Arab Spring Mean for Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus,” Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), 12 September 2011, (Washington DC: CSIS, 2011), p. 1.

³¹ Lisa Blaydes, James Lo, “One Man, One Vote, One Time? A Model of Democratization in the Middle East,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* (underreview), July 8, 2011, p. 1-36, p. 1.

³² Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), qf., Lisa Blaydes, James Lo, “One Man, One Vote, One Time? A Model of Democratization in the Middle East,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* (underreview), July 8, 2011, p. 1-36, p. 2

should able bring a democratic system of governance that reflects the religious, cultural and historical realities of the Middle East.³³

Democracy, human rights, and freedom are tools that pave the way for Western mentality to interfere into other countries. If dictators obey the Western masters they would sustain their power, if not there will be a clash of interest. This claim is evidently true when we refer to what has been stated by William Blum in his work *Washington Historian*. In his work Blum has stated that the US has destroyed or subverted more that 50 governments, many of them democracies, and used mass murderers like Suharto, Mobutu, and Pinochet to dominate by proxy since 1945, and thus every dictatorship and pseudo-monarchy has been maintained by the United States of America.

Therefore, the Arab revolt is not merely against the local dictators but there is a hidden factor behind which reflects the worldwide economic tyranny designed by the US Treasury and imposed by the US Agency for International Development, the IMF and World Bank etc.³⁴

Throughout the 20th century the Arab ego had been fairly damaged. Since the beginning of the last century until the invasion of Iraq in 2003, with the creation of the state of Israel in the heart of Muslim land, Arab history faces continuous defeats, retreats, disappointments and foreign domination that the Arab has to be rescued from battered and bruised ego.³⁵

Conclusion

Turkey after 2002, with its new policies in economy and democratic reforms enjoys increased popularity as a soft power in the region, and made itself considerably attractive to many countries in the Middle East which have a vibrant economy and

³³ Ayse Kadayifci and Peter Weinberger, "Egypt on Fire," The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, Issue Brief no.2. p. 1-2.

³⁴ John Pilger, "Behind the Arab Revolt is a Word We Dare Not Speak," February 25, 2011, <http://original.antiwar.com/pilger/2011/02/24/behind-the-arab-revolt-is-a-word-we-dare-not-speak/> accessed 05 November 2011.

³⁵ Joseph El-Khoury, "The Rise of Arab Ego," October 16, 2011, http://www.arabdemocracy.com/2011_10_01_archive.html accessed 07 November 2011.

show interest for democratic change. The election to office of the AKP Party, despite several economic and political crises, made it stay focused in power and be an example to other neighbouring countries in the region; politically, socially and economically. The triumphant win of AK Party enhanced its influence not only in the Middle East but elsewhere in the Muslim world. Hence, the positive development that is taking place in Turkey to a certain extent brought countries like Iran, Iraq, Greece, the United States of America and Caucasus in close relationship with it. Despite Erdogan's call for secularism in the Middle East, the people's attention has not gone astray.

Although secularism has failed in Turkey with the victory of AK Party, Turkey aims at re-defining the term secularism rather than going by the old understanding of secularism. If the old definition is synonymous to 'unfaithfulness', the new definition which is called by Ghassan Atiyyah as "faithful secularism" (*'almaniyya mumine*).³⁶ "They saw in this triumph a clear sign of Turkey's return to the fold of being an Islamic nation, and positive proof of the failure of the "Turkish secularism" – and a defeat for all defenders of secularism in the region."³⁷

The outcome of the most important foreign reflection of the Turkish foreign policy is the popular uprisings, termed as "the Arab Spring", in which Turkey has contributed in away. Turkey's return to democracy has sent the message to the Arab world that in the modern and sophisticated world that we live today there is no room for dictators and authoritarian government. The masses in the Arab world can no longer be kept under the yoke of tyranny and oppression. With the emergence of hand phones, computers and internet services, the masses are well informed of what is happening outside their own countries and also on their rights as citizens.³⁸

³⁶ Ghassan Atiyyeh in Workshop on *Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East*, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul, qf., Meliha Benli Altunşik, "Turkey: Arab Perspectives," Foreign Policy Analysis Series 11, (Ankara: Tesev Publication, 2010), p. 16.

³⁷ Salaheddine Jourchi, "Reform Policies of the Turkish AK Party: Setting an Example for Arab Islamists?" *Qantara.de*, 10 June 2006, available at http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-591/i.html (Accessed on 17 November 2011).

³⁸ İlhan Sağsen, "Arap Baharı, Türk Dış Politikası ve Dış Algılaması" *The Arab Spring, Turkish Foreign Policy, and the Foreign Perception Ortadoğu Analiz*, Temmuz- Ağustos 2011, cilt : 3, sayı 31-32