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Turkey's Regional Powerhood Within Regional (In)Security Complex: Transformation From a Conflict-ridden Environment Into a Security Community

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Abstract: Many optimists believed that the “Arab Spring” was a ripe moment for regional radiant Turkey with its pro-active stance that could trigger “demonstrative effect” and transform the conflict-ridden Middle Eastern (in) security complex into a pluralistic security community. However, those expectations on Turkey’s capabilities to transform the region have fallen short as Middle East re-entered into turmoil. In this light, the article aims to conduct an academic inquiry into the reasons that curtailed Turkey of priming the pump for a regional security community in the region. It argues that international system (structural), sub-systemic (regional), and finally that of agential factors (Turkey’s own domestic embodiment) hindered Turkey’s efforts to transform the Middle East into security community. It concludes that three main hindrances (that of systemic, sub-systemic and domestic) which altogether, but particularly the latter, render Turkey to fall short in restoring peace and stability back to the Middle East at the time of Arab uprisings.

Keywords: Turkey, Middle East, regional security complex, security community.

Introduction

The so-called “Arab Spring” happened to a region wherein peace has never lasted beyond what a mechanical balance of power could possibly promise. In the rough neighbourhood of the Middle East, no agent (state) could obtain “one more degree of safety” before causing a corresponding decline in one another’s security position. The conditions of

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human existence within the Middle East have remained imprisoned to such endemic status of widespread insecurity for much of the last six decades.

The established status quo within the Middle East, which is solely responsible for the present Hobbesian inter-state order, became exposed to a serious challenge emanating from the “Arab Spring”. At the initial stages, many rushed to invest their hopes in the popular upheavals as a long overdue discontent of the Arabic people. To this point of view, the energy created by them would soon generate a motion powerful enough to bring down established regional order. Furthermore, this time, a pioneer, template and even engineer, such as Turkey, was also available there to start crafting a version of security community out of the unleashed nerve of the Middle Eastern peoples. Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country with a relatively advanced democracy and market economy, quickly undertook this role only to see a sheer failure in seizing such moment of seemingly great convenience.

This article aims to conduct an academic inquiry into the reasons that have effectively barred Turkey from performing a regional hegemon(y)¹ and/or the role of a model country.² These reasons, to name the three most significant of them, stem from systemic (structural), sub-systemic (regional), and finally that of agential factors (Turkey’s own domestic shortcomings).

This work will kick start with conceptualizing Middle East as a regional (in)security complex wherein the game of security (with material as well as non-material means) unfolds among different state actors. The second part will conceptualize Turkey’s regional powerhood, whether it is a regionally detached power, regionally dominant, and/or regional hegemon. The third, and the final part, delves into the said three main hindrances (that of systemic, sub-systemic and domestic) which altogether render Turkey an underperforming regional hegemon in restoring peace and stability back to the Middle East.

Conceptualizing the Middle East as a Regional (In)Security Complex

Hedley Bull’s desire for a world that is not partitioned by two alpha states (Soviets and the US) but organized around a “more regionalized world system”³ seems to come true once the Cold War’s bipolar division left the central stage. After this ground-breaking event, the paramount significance of systemic determinants within the foreign policy making of many, if not all, state actors has gradually been downsized by threats and opportunities

1 The regional hegemon creates a political order in which the hegemon’s mode of thinking becomes dominant without a regular reference to violence. These states undertake to make a disproportional contribution in solving challenges and providing stability in the region. At least partly, they ensure the pursuit of common goods for all or most members from within its sphere of influence. Prys 2010.

2 For a discussion on the feasibility of Turkish model in the Arab world in the light of changing political environment see: Samaan 2013.

3 Bull 1977, 261.

perceived from region-based developments.⁴ A top-down system level analysis (great power politics or balance of power), so elucidates Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, should be therefore consummated with an additional cognitive layer, “regional security complexes” (RSCs), that encompasses the material and non-material ways of interaction between the neighbouring states.⁵

The RSC, as the locus point of this work, is taken by B. Buzan as “a distinct and significant sub-system of security relations existing among a set of states whose fate is locked into geographical proximity.”⁶ Whereas ‘security’ or ‘insecurity’ is, first, a relational phenomenon that gains form when only, but only, more than one political community (agents or nations) find a joint space to interact with one and “other”; RSCs should be this joint space wherein a play over security unfolds. Wæver and Buzan reach the same point, stating, “...most threats travel more easily over short distances than long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally patterned clusters.”⁷

Agents, framed into different levels of interpenetration with other agents, following up Buzan’s constructivism, become, “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another.”⁸ He concludes that an RSC grows into an either “mature anarchy”⁹ with amity ordering the states’ mutual perceptions, or finds itself interlocked within a prevailing mode of enmity that merely breeds a Realist version of bitter anarchy.¹⁰

Karl Deutsch puts it forward that no state actor might be near to achieving security communities unless it promotes a “We-feeling” with and among the recipient states.¹¹ In this acquisition process of new behavioral patterns, this state actor drives mechanisms of change through persuasion, not deterrence or balancing. With the help of founded regional institutions it encourages an active process of collectively redefining and reinterpreting “reality” in hopes of leading to the enlargement of the concert of states that share a common interest in peaceful change.

In Alexander Wendt’s contention, amity, that being the range from genuine friendship to protection or support, and enmity, that being a relationship of suspicion or fear, should

4 Buzan *et al.* 1998, 5.

5 *Ibid.*, 199–202, 236.

6 Buzan 1991, 188.

7 Buzan and Wæver 2003, 4.

8 Buzan *et al.* 1998, 201.

9 Buzan 1991, 77.

10 *Ibid.*, 188.

11 Deutsch *et al.* 1957, 5; Adler and Barnett 1988.

be treated separately from any balance of power rationale, according to which states fear/befriend whoever exerts the most power.¹²

There are mainly three factors, according to this article shaping the essential characteristics – whether amity or enmity will prevail – in a given regional order. The most important of these are: the character/the degree of extra-regional penetration, security perceptions of (especially major) regional powers in an RSC (whether compatible, or not), and whether domestic elites manage to consolidate a measure of legitimacy over their own sovereign space.¹³

As can be gleaned from this landscape, the Middle Eastern RSC (MERSC) is foredoomed to grow an interminable anarchy and instability when one considers that none of the said three parameters are favourably situated within the regional context. First and foremost, the extra powers (or “capitalist core”¹⁴ in Johan Galtung’s terms) have never been absent from the scene of MERSC since the end of the WWII. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami propound that the Middle East, once a glorious civilizational locus, “...has been turned into a periphery of the Western-dominated world system,” as of the early 20th Century.¹⁵ Outcome is, as what L. Carl Brown defines, a “penetrated system”¹⁶ that progressively lowered the region to an unending predicament. In this light, American own version of Middle Eastern security is simply about the protection of Israel and some other key oil producers against any regional culprit that owns means and will to threaten them. As Pinar Bilgin rightfully states, such agenda imposed over the region from without completely casts off human security concerns, intends to detain any regional cooperation that comes around excluding American protectorate, and sharpens regional conflicts.¹⁷

Secondly, the distribution of physical capacities, together with clashing security perceptions shaped by the borders in disputes (Israel–Palestine, Iran–Iraq, Turkey–Syria etc.), ethnically or religiously motivated irredentism (Palestinians in Lebanon or Kurds in Turkey), ideological alignments/conflicts (Revolutionary Shiite, Saudi led Wahhabism, Salafism, Muslim Brotherhood (Ihvan), Turkey’s pro-western model or Zionism), enduring

12 Wendt 1994, 386.

13 Buzan and Wæver 2003, 51–54.

14 See Galtung 1971.

15 Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2002, 3.

16 Brown 1984, 3–5.

17 Bilgin 2004.

memoirs of victimizations (Holocaust or “Ashura Paradigm”¹⁸) have been (re)shaping patterns of amity and enmity. This phenomenon provides the ground for a multipolar competition. Indeed, among four middle powers – Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel¹⁹ have been struggling for regional dominance with ever changing alliances, which effectively impedes any prospect for a long tenure of regional stability.²⁰ For instance, Saudi Arabia perceives threat from Iran and not surprisingly in addition to Israel, Saudi Arabia pressed hard extra territorial power the US for a military intervention against Iran. As President Bush noted in his memoirs “Israel and our Arab allies found themselves in a rare moment of unity. Both were deeply concerned about Iran...”²¹ As it will noted below, this was also particularly the case over most recent crisis over Yemen.

Third, the Arab Middle East is composed of “hybrid-sovereign”²² states that command neither material nor ideological basis of legitimacy to stand as defined and stable entities.²³ This is mainly due to the fact that “... real sovereignty is constrained [in the Arab Middle East] owing to the imperial inheritance and the persisting residues of empires

18 It is the 10th day of Muharram in Islamic calendar and a day of mourning especially for the Shia Muslims. On that day in 680 AD (61 AH), the Battle of Karbala took place and Hussein Ibn Ali (Prophet Muhammad's grandson) and his followers were massacred by the armies of Yazid, the Umayyad Caliph. Hazleton 2009, 2–3. It is one of the most influential events that led to deeper Shia – Sunni divide in the Muslim world and became the basis of identity and self-victimization rhetoric among the Shia in addition to other persecutions (long wars between Iran and the Ottoman Empire) they suffered throughout centuries. In this respect, similar to Holocaust for Jews, it too shapes the national narrative and foreign policy behavior. As a result of the feeling of being surrounded by the enemies the motive for survival is of paramount importance.

19 As Carsten Holbraad defines, middle-powers are the “states that are weaker than the great powers in the system but significantly stronger than the minor powers and small states with which they normally interact. [...] In very large systems, particularly the global system of the second half of the twentieth century, middle powers often play their most conspicuous parts within their own regions, where their immediate interests usually lie”. Holbraad 1984, 4. As Ehteshami notes only Turkey, Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia can be defined as “middle powers” in the Middle East today and they “project influence, exert pressure and try and drive agendas which are of direct interest to them”. Ehteshami 2014, 36. Eduard Jordaan suggested a distinction between the “traditional” and “emerging” middle-powers. According to him, Turkey along with Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia and South Africa can be classified in the latter group while Sweden, Norway, Canada and Australia belong to the former. See; Jordaan 2003.

20 Lustick 1997.

21 Bush 2010, 429.

22 “Hybrid sovereignty refers both to the inapplicability of the Western type of sovereignty criterion and to the consequences of the Arab states’ position between modernity and tradition...it recognizes the constructive clash between the Western [state] model and local [ethnic, religious, tribal, etc.] forms.” Bacik 2008, 6. For a precise account on Ottoman legacy of millet system that paved the way for the misfit between national territory and identity within the modern Arab Middle East see; Karpas 2002.

23 For an illuminative account on regime security considerations rather than conventional balance of power as the principal concern for the Middle Eastern countries, see Gause 2010.

with real consequences including weak stateness (internal sovereignty) and dependencies constraining international autonomy.²⁴ All in all, as Raymond Hinnebusch puts it:

The Middle East regional system, largely imposed from without by Western imperialism, constitutes the specific material context within which a regional international society had to be constructed...the Middle East is centred on a fragmented core made up of weak, initially pre-modern territorial states sharing an Arab identity and a periphery of more or less hostile stronger and more modern non-Arab states (Iran, Turkey and Israel) tied together by conflict, they constitute a [in]security complex...²⁵

Many commentators have proposed that Arab uprisings have provided the ripe moment for a transformation to take place in the wider Middle East and expressed their hopes by labelling this (actually open-ended) transition as “spring”. Encouraged by this seemingly convenient environment, many internal/external political figures in the Arab world have pointed out to EU candidate and NATO member Turkey as what could possibly generate a “demonstrative effect”²⁶, heartening a gradual regional transformation towards a “security community”²⁷ at worse, “positive peace environment”²⁸ at best.

Turkey’s Regional Powerhood Within the Middle East: Building a Security Community?

The end of bipolar balance, to the most extent, eliminated so-called “superpower overlay”, which all through the Cold War era functioned to narrow states’ foreign policy choices. As a direct consequence of this, a number of state actors rose to greater prominence in their own regional theatre, with Turkey being one of them. Since then, however, these regional heavyweights have developed all dissimilar reactions to their now superpower less “penetrated” regional environment. According to Prys’s taxonomy, regional power

24 Cummings and Hinnebusch 2011, 9. For an account treating sovereignty as a matter of degrees: domestic, interdependence, international legal sovereignty, and Westphalia; Krasner 1999.

25 Hinnebusch 2009, 203.

26 While analysing underlying reasons of regime changes (toward democracy) in the late twentieth century, Huntington proposes “demonstration effects” or that of “snowballing” as one of the five independent variables. This concept simply means that democratization in one country encourages democratization in other countries. For elaboration of the concept and the role it played in the third wave, see; Huntington 1991, 100–106. For the application of the concept for Turkey in the Middle East, see, Kirişçi 2011.

27 A security community is a region in which a large-scale use of violence (such as war) has become very unlikely or even unthinkable. See: Deutsch *et al.* 1957.

28 The term “positive peace” was first coined by the leading peace studies scholar, Johan Galtung, to denote not only the absence of overt violent conflict (negative peace), but also, formation of structural collaborative/supportive relations in a given society. See, Galtung 1964, 1–4. For further elaboration on the concept, see, Galtung 1981.

behaviour can evidently be categorized under one or more of these three ideal types: “detached regional power”, “regional dominator” and “regional hegemony.”²⁹

A regional dominator, as the term itself suggests, comes to conceive of no ideational affinity or “We-feeling” for other cohabitants of a region but depicts them as “others” who deserves enmity. It reflects no interest in persuasion but realises its foreign policy objectives through military coercion. On the other hand, a regionally detached power (RDP), regardless of the material resources at its disposal, sees no value in instituting a presence or weight within the adjacent regions. An RDP might well sense indifference/alienation to those norms that characterises the political and cultural settings of the rest of the region.

In both cases of these regional powerhoods, political elites tend to align themselves with a range of foreign policy tools that either gesture an aiding or neutral position to the “negative security environment.” Neither one of them, but a regional hegemon, deems a “positive security environment” integral to its own well being, Prys contends.³⁰ A regional hegemon attains distinction from these two with its will, capability and well-articulated interests to assume a pioneering position in settling down regional disputes through norm-building, institution-framing and economic omni-enmeshment.

Turkey, specifically in the aftermath of the 9/11, has commenced reorienting its foreign policy in substantial ways, contextualizing its own security into the developments that take place within the Middle East Regional (In) security Complex. Its high level economic growth up to 2009 also provided a source of self-confidence and autonomy in foreign policy as it was named as a “near-BRICs country”³¹ or “twenty first century’s first Muslim power.”³²

Ömer Taşpınar, to put emphasis on Turkey’s new revisionary demeanour, coined term of “Turkish Gaullism” that bespeaks a “more nationalist, self-confident and defiant...” Turkey.³³ The resultant divergence in between Ankara and the West in general, the US in particular, as it will be elaborated below, seemed to further strengthen Arabs perception of Turkey. Large portions of Arab public opinion credits this predominantly Muslim country as one that has made spontaneous headways toward two western norms, democracy and market economy, while still running a course of action independent from the western core. It was

29 Prys 2010.

30 *Ibid.*, 492.

31 Öniş and Kutlay 2013. Turkey was also included among the MINT Group (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey) developed by Jim O’Neill as the next economic giants to the BRICs, see: Cocks, Tim. 2014. “Jim O’Neill: BRICs, MINTs Strong Despite Emerging Market Wobbles.” *Reuters*, March 25. Accessed May 14, 2015. <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/03/25/emergingmarkets-oneill-idINDEEA2O0DY20140325> .

32 Cagaptay 2014.

33 Taşpınar 2011.

possible to observe Turkey's rising popularity at many Arab polls in the early phases of the Arab Spring. However due to the factors that will be mentioned below and especially due to its management of Arab uprisings, particularly in the case of Syria, Turkey's popularity started to drop down from 2012 on. This fall continued in 2013 and Turkey's popularity fell to 59 per cent (it was 78 per cent in 2011 and 69 per cent in 2012).³⁴

Especially the outbreak of popular upheavals across the Middle East, a loud and clear discontent of Arabic people with the lack of democratic progress and economic wealth, gave a powerful substance to the idea of a Turkish model for a peaceful change in the Middle East. As Kemal Kirişçi lucidly puts,

...unlike in the past, this time the debate is occurring against a backdrop of successful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia [and also Syria] that have raised the genuine prospects of actual reform. This time Turkey is being shown as a model by the very people who are involved in efforts to bring about reform and transformation the Arab world.³⁵

Turkey needs to graduate into the status of a regional hegemony should a regional security community, or positive peace environment, ever materialise within the Middle East. Following up the same argument, the authors of this article point out three different, but still connected, sources of impediment to this outcome: continual penetration of the western core, the US; competing visions among Turkey, Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia; finally the democratic deficit of Turkish politics. These systemic, regional and domestic sources of hindrance are what has rendered the idea of a Middle Eastern RSC a non-starter, and will likely continue to bar Turkish state from moving from its present, limboistic state vacillating in between a regional dominator and that of a hegemon.

The Recurrent Penetration of External Powers

Hybrid-sovereign states of the Arab Middle East, from their very inception, have sought out the backing of colonial European powers – first the British and France empires, and then that of the US subsequently, for protection against their own domestic oppositions and/or other stronger regional states. And, all of these are set in motion by the former colonial states that artfully insinuated insecurity into the structure of the Middle East's regional order. So much so that most of the region's state, bereft of sufficient economic and military strength to survive on their own in a dangerous geopolitical setting, have always had to welcome the penetration of external powers.

34 Akgün and Gündoğar 2014, 9. In addition to its dropping popularity level, more people started to think that Turkey follows a sectarian foreign policy as it rose from 28 per cent (2012) to 39 per cent (2013). Despite the fact that in this respect Turkey still has the lowest score and all ME countries have a rising score in this issue; this is alarming for a secular country like Turkey. *Ibid.*, 13.

35 Kirişçi 2011, 35.

Ankara, with its new-found confidence, vocally calls the Middle East of the day as an out lived reminiscent of a colonial past, thus openly advising a major revision over this conflict-driving regional order. Be that as it may, Turkey is outmatched when juxtaposed to the current super power, the US, and any act of internal or external hard balancing is utterly ineffective.

Mustafa Aydın once pointedly put, “Turkey’s understanding of the nature of the post-Cold War era moving towards multipolarity (hence its attempts to balance its various relationships) contrasted with the US attempt to create a unipolar world. Such diversions affected the relationship.”³⁶ The world politics, however, long dispatched from that juncture with the US itself, to use the term of Fareed Zakaria, is currently settling into accommodating the realities of a “post-American world.”³⁷ Turkey’s respond to this shift in structural level was quick. With its ascending material means, Ankara has moved to adopt a whole new policy line as what is called “omni-balancing”³⁸, gently disagreeing, but not necessarily “soft-balancing”, with the US continuing “extra-regional hegemony” strategy³⁹, while still avoiding open confrontation with this major western power.

From a rather ideational, not material, perspective, the pro-Islamist AKP has proved ambitious to alter this disorderly region into a defined cognitive space, on the basis of anti-Western modernist paradigm, maintaining a measure of autonomy from direct Western influence. The concept of Pax Ottomana and the Ottoman legacy which are influential in Turkish national narrative⁴⁰ and especially popular among the current policy-makers led to the understanding that the disorder and conflicts in the MENA region are caused by the policies of the Great Powers and Turkey is the only country that can work as an “order-settling actor” in the region thanks to its past imperial experience. For this reason

36 Aydın 2009.

37 Zakaria 2008.

38 See, Han 2010.

39 Contrary to the argument put forward by Mearsheimer, who states that the US served as an “off-shore balancer” or “global broker” following its victory in the World War II, the authors of this article agree with Layne’s argument that the US has been implementing a foreign policy based on “extra-regional hegemony” since 1940s. See: Layne 2006, 15–21. According to John Mearsheimer, the concept of the “stopping power of water” led the US, as a maritime power, to acquire hegemony only within its own geographical region (the western hemisphere), and in other parts of the world it merely acts as an “offshore balancer.” See: Mearsheimer 2002, 236–37.

40 Reference to the Ottoman past is very common in Turkish popular discourse and the cliché of “reigning over three continents - üç kıtada hüküm sürmek” is often heard. For example Tayyip Erdoğan once stated “Our ancestors reigned over three continents and left highly valuable monuments there”. “Topkapı Sarayı’nda Muhteşem Yenilik.” Zaman, August 28, 2011. Accessed 13 May 2015. http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_topkapi-sarayinda-muhtesem-yenilik_1174336.html.

it is possible to observe references to Turkey's "regional and historical responsibilities."⁴¹ In this respect, Turkey also tried to portray itself as the main advocate of Muslims all over the world as seen in Turkish initiatives for Palestine and Myanmar. Given the lack of leadership and power vacuum in the Middle East and the Muslim world in general, this policy has been suggested as the best approach for Turkey. Graham Fuller was one of those experts who welcomed this development and Turkey's realization of its "historical role within the Muslim world" and he argued that "in the following decade, Turkey, for the first time in its modern history, is becoming a major player in the Middle East."⁴²

Additionally, Turkey's refusal to support the US in keeping Iran from developing a nuclear arsenal has everything to do with Ankara being increasingly convinced that any solution to the issue should be solved within and through the security dialogue of the regional states.⁴³ Another example of Turkey's political defiance of the US can be seen in Turkey's repeated critics of Israel's overt use of aggressive military force during regional disagreements culminated with the Flotilla crisis taking the lives of eight Turkish citizens on 31 May 2010.⁴⁴

In light of these discussions, Turkey has thus far managed to hold to her new foreign policy objectives without provoking any serious exasperation from the White House, for the time being. It is likely enough that the latter can accommodate manoeuvring space for the former to the extent with which such manoeuvring does not begird the established status quo, in which the US has essential stakes. Considering the incredibly high concentration of American interests nested upon ensuring uninterrupted flow of the region's massive energy wealth for itself and also for the global economy,⁴⁵ Washington cannot allow Turkey to unrestrainedly sow the seeds of her ambitions in the soil of this region. Indeed, if Turkey passes a particular threshold, in which the US' influence in the region is threatened, then Ankara will find itself clashing with the US and, as a result of the irremediable power asymmetry, will likely have no option but to watch its foreign policy endeavour backsliding.

41 Ahmet Davutoğlu, the then Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister, emphasized this role in 2008: "Given this picture, Turkey should make its role of a peripheral country part of its past and appropriate a new position: one of providing security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighboring regions. Turkey should guarantee its own security and stability by taking on a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs". Davutoğlu 2008, 79.

42 Fuller 2008, 5.

43 "Iran Nuclear Issue." 2011 BBC January 11. Accessed 31 January 2011.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11709428>.

"Turkey Ready to Do Everything for Diplomatic Solution to Iran's Nuclear Issue." 2011. TurkishNY.com, February 16. Accessed 31 March 2011.

http://www.turkishny.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&Itemid=119&id=47675.

44 For political implications of the crisis, see Harris, Paul. 2010. "Gaza flotilla attack: A week that changed Middle East politics." *The Guardian*, June 6. Accessed 14 May 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/06/gaza-flotilla-attack-israel-turkey>.

45 Stokes 2007.

Turkey's recent rapprochement with Iran proved ephemeral, soon leaving its place to a region wide competition for influencing the wider region, particularly Iraq and Syria and more recently Yemen,⁴⁶ while "Arab Spring" is turning into "Winter". Parties seem to reach the limits of cooperation due to the distinctly different agendas. In tune with what is just said about imbedded insecurity in Iranian foreign policy attitude, Iran sees the fall of Assad regime in Damascus – which is the assurance for "the Syrian-Iranian axis"⁴⁷ or the rise of Sunni groups such as Muslim Brotherhood (Ihvan) and Salafids – elsewhere in the Middle East as a threat to its existence.⁴⁸

Israel, like Iran, is inspired by its own version of the Middle East. Unfortunately, that ideal is squarely opposed to what Turkey envisions for the region. While the governing principle of Turkey's new foreign policy touts region-wide cooperation, including formerly adversarial states like Iran and Syria, the Israeli state still clings to its established status quo, with the support of and from the US. One of the holes on the fabric of strategic partnership between two states appeared when Turkey prioritized a proactive stance in region's various disputes, to most of which Israel is a party and staunchly refuses any drastic change in the status quo.

Turkey's Democratic Deficit and Implications for Its Regional Powerhood

The EU anchor has always been paramount for Turkey to further its own democratization process, which is an integral piece of Turkey's role model appeal to the rest of the Middle Eastern people. Be noted that the main part of Turkey's appeal to its neighbours arises from the Country's pledge to fulfil its Europeanization process as a predominantly Muslim country. Thanks to its Europeanization through EU conditionality, specifically from 2002–2006, Turkey has begun to shift its foreign policy perception from a zero-sum mentality to a new position that is conducive to Europe's good neighbourhood policies.⁴⁹ However, this pro-European stance was to wane soon, leaving its place to the stalled accession negotiations with Brussels. The Euroscepticism, which is presently at its zenith within Turkey, has been further aggravated by the discriminating rhetoric of particular European leaders, such as Merkel and Sarkozy, who uttered a vocal critique to Turkey's

46 Turkey supported the military operation led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen against the Houthis. President Tayyip Erdogan demanded Iran to withdraw its forces in Yemen while complaining that "Iran is trying to dominate the region". Humeyra, Pamuk. 2015. "Turkey's Erdogan says can't tolerate Iran bid to dominate Middle East." Reuters, March, 27. Accessed 14 May 2015. <http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/03/26/yemen-security-turkey-idINKBN0MM2NW20150326>.

47 See, Goodarzi 2009.

48 In this respect the memory of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) that erupted just after the Islamic Revolution is still alive in Iran and contributes to the sense of isolation and fear. Najmeh, Bozorgmehr and Daragahi, Borzou. 2014. "Iraq Violence Stirs Iranians' Bitter Memories of 1980s War." The Financial Times, 23 July 2014. Accessed 13 May 2015. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/93faf24c-0c18-11e4-9080-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3a3Ei4cVA>.

49 Aydın and Açıkmeşe 2005. See also, Özcan 2008.

membership. In the light of these negative developments, Turkey's Europeanization process has grinded to halt depriving its democratization process of necessary impetus.

In this regard, it should come as no a surprise that the AKP's shortfalls in furthering democratic reforms presents no help for solving the Kurdish Problem, Armenian question and re-opening the Greek Ortodox Halki Seminar in Istanbul. There are also serious problems with regards to the freedom of speech, rule of law and press freedom. In the Democracy Index prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit, description of Turkish democracy as "hybrid" ranking it even below Ghana and Albania, barely demonstrates how much road is lying ahead before Turkey catches up with the finest standards of a true liberal political culture.⁵⁰ The European Court of Human Rights makes another bleak assessment of democratic progress inside Turkey under the AKP rule. Turkey is graded as the worst violator of human rights among other 47 signatory parties by this top judicial authority that rules on human right abuses all over the Europe.⁵¹

This obvious derailment from EU-prompted democratization reforms grossly sets back Turkey's ability to transform the regional (in) security complex of the Middle East in at least three ways. It suffocates Turkey's international/regional prestige; weakens domestic dynamics necessary to accomplish self-restraint on articulating chosen foreign policy objectives; and finally drags country into a partisan gesture in the mediation of regional disputes.

International/regional prestige: As the two authors of this article discussed this matter elsewhere in more detail,⁵² there is a direct link between the way Turkey ensures its domestic authority and its international/regional prestige. The concept of prestige differs from power as follows,

Prestige is the reputation for power...Whereas power refers to the economic, military, and related capabilities of a state, prestige refers primarily to the perception of other states with respect to a state's capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise power...prestige involves the credibility of a state's power and its willingness to deter or compel other states in order to achieve its objectives.⁵³ [Emphasis added]

In Gilpin's writings, prestige in international politics is portrayed as one of an integral function that, in terms of its operation and consequences, intimately corresponds with what the authority performs and produces in domestic politics. From his vantage point,

50 The Economist 2007. In the following years, Turkey's position started to deteriorate (it was the 88th in 2007) and it was ranked 98 out of 167 countries in 2014. "Democracy Index: Turkey Regressing, Sliding Toward Authoritarian Regime." Zaman, 22 January 2015. Accessed 13 May 2015. http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_democracy-index-turkey-regressing-sliding-toward-authoritarian-regime_370530.html

51 The European Court of Human Rights 2012.

52 See, İşeri and Dilek 2012.

53 Gilpin 1981, 30–31.

“...prestige, rather than power, is the everyday currency of international relations, much as authority is the central ordering feature of domestic society.”⁵⁴ The critical matter at this point is, a state actor might substantially boost its international prestige over other state actors by attuning the course of its domestic politics to the democratic principles, thereby, peacefully solving various sectarian/religious disputes, such as Kurdish or Alawi predicaments in Turkey’s case.

The said sort of accomplishments works on two levels. It helps a country, like Turkey, to build itself as a precedent (role model) for all other Middle Eastern countries paralyzed by similar domestic problems. Second, it also helps market a country’s public appearance beyond its borders as a political entity that avoids lawless action in international domain just as it avoids lawless action at home front. Therefore, any given state with a “consolidated democracy”⁵⁵ will bolster the amplitude of its “power over opinions,”⁵⁶ to use the term of E.H. Carr, both in national and international scenes.

The key question is: whether or not the maturity of Turkish democracy is anywhere close to be licensed as a working role model for the Arab-speaking world. Previously discussed, a country’s level of domestic authority produces particular foreign policy outcomes. Only a hegemonic regional actor with a robust democratic embodiment in its domestic realm might hope to obtain the leverage of international prestige (defined as a capacity to reposition “others” foreign policy priorities without the use of crude power). If so, the chances for Turkey then to gain one such leverage (international prestige) is on the run with one-time zeal for becoming a democracy in European standards no longer holds.

The fear is that although the AKP has thus far successfully denied a towering place to the Turkish military in domestic politics, it has yet to put a forthright effort to inaugurate the necessary constitutional mechanism that will limit its own maneuvering space. Samuel P. Huntington indicates “the absence or weakness of real commitment to democratic values among political leaders” as a serious impediment to democratization. He elaborates his point with these words:

Political leaders out of office [or not fully in control of the regime due to military tutelage] have good reason to advocate democracy. The test of their democratic commitment comes when they are in office...In those regions [Asia and the Middle East]...elected leaders themselves were also responsible for ending democracy:...Park Chung Hee in Korea; Adnan Menderes in Turkey; Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines...These leaders won power through electoral system and then used their power to undermine that system.⁵⁷ [emphasis added]

54 Gilpin 1981, 31.

55 This paper defines “democratic consolidation” as maturity of a new democracy that will unlikely to revert to authoritarianism. See: Schedler 1998.

56 Carr 2001, 120.

57 Huntington 1991, 297.

The AKP, despite its persistence on diminishing the role of Turkey's military in domestic politics, seems nevertheless much less enthusiastic or capable when it comes to pushing for a more liberal political order that can indifferently portray all demands coming from the society.

Self-restraint on pursuing aggressive foreign policy: Immanuel Kant, the founder of "Perpetual Peace Theory,"⁵⁸ deliberates that a legitimate domestic authority, operating in democratic limits, also automatically confines the policy-forming cadres to pursuing a none-aggressive foreign policy route.⁵⁹ The criterion of accountability to their own public will keep them away from being entrapped into any ideological cell, thereby, staying in the boundaries of "rationality", limiting the scope and the length of the ruling elites' conflict breeding attitudes/behaviors in their relations with other state. Displacement of EU anchor in Turkey has given way to the loss of self-restraint over those practices that govern Ankara's new foreign policy activism. As Ziya Öniş propounds,

If there is a commitment to EU membership on the part of Turkish politicians or policy makers, there should also be a commitment towards acting with the rest of the world on issues of common concern. This, in turn, requires a more multilateral, as opposed to unilateral, approach and a certain degree of self-restraint in the way that foreign policy activism is put into practice.⁶⁰ [Emphasis added]

To make it concrete in the Turkish context, as Svante Cornell argues, the power of Islamist ideology, anti-Western modernist paradigm, of the AKP elites set the wheels in motion for Turkey to drift away from the West. The net effect of this paradigm shift has increasingly translated itself into a poorly articulated and conflict-driven foreign policy position.⁶¹ Indeed, many controversial statements of Turkish Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdoğan, carry the traces of his pro-Islamist ideology. For instance, in reference to Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir, who has been accused by the International Criminal Court of nefarious crimes against humanity, Erdoğan stated in 2009 that "a Muslim cannot commit genocide."⁶² Cornell also boldly claims that Israel in general and Jews in particular, took their shares from many castigations of Erdoğan, which in times even took on anti-Semitic contours. Such remarks have a powerful appeal to the fundamental Islamist movements around the world. The single most important evidence to the credibility of Cornell's judgement is a statement actually made by Erdoğan himself whereby he claimed the symbol of Judaism to be reminding of Nazi's, another rhetorical salvo to criticise Israel's heavy-handed Palestinian policies without taking any notice of diplomatic traditions.⁶³

58 See: Kant 1983.

59 See: Doyle 1983.

60 Öniş 2011, 59.

61 Cornell, 2012. For a comparison of Islamic and Western paradigms, see Davutoğlu 1993.

62 "Prime Minister Erdoğan reiterates 'no genocide' in Darfur." *Today's Zaman*, 9 November 2009. Accessed 18 March 2012. <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-192402-prime-minister-erdogan-reiterates-no-genocide-in-darfur.html>.

63 Ergin, Sedat. 2010. "Nazizim le Yahudiliğin sembolleri bir tutulabilir mi? (Can the Symbols of Nazism and Judaism Be Considered Equal?)" *Hürriyet*, 16 June 2010.

Bipartisanship in mediation efforts: Credibility is considered to be one of the forthcoming preconditions for a successful mediator in any given conflict resolution process.⁶⁴ No reconciliation might come out of a negotiation process wherein one of the disputants comes to lose its confidence in the ascribed mediator's quality of fairness in running the sessions. Thus, it is essential for the mediator to preserve an equal distance to the parties around the negotiation table.

Arguably, this is the principal reason as to why Turkey failed in midwifing multilateral talks for several conflicts, including ones in-between Israel–Syria and the US–Iran. After a brief success along the path, from February to December 2008, the direct talks between the parties never materialized due to Israeli aerial attacks and invasion of Gaza Strip (for three weeks) in December 2008.⁶⁵ The following year, in Davos, Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan heavily criticized Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories.⁶⁶ This deterioration trend in affairs between the two countries only gained pace from then on with Prime Minister Netanyahu, in October 2009, blaming Turkey as a non-credible broker in Syria talks.⁶⁷ Following month when asked whether he would approve any further Turkish mediation to resume the halted talks, Netanyahu repeated his earlier point that, "the Turkish Prime Minister has not strengthened his image as an objective, fair mediator."⁶⁸ Even the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, underscored this point by stating that "if the relationship between Turkey and Israel is not renewed, it will be very difficult for Turkey to play a role in negotiations."⁶⁹ As a result of these said impasses, given birth by a distanced membership prospect to the EU, a mode of "hyperactivity"⁷⁰, but not pro-activity, came to dominate Turkey's foreign policy as well,

...But despite years of diplomatic engagement and economic investment, Turkey could not persuade Mr. Assad to cease the violence and move ahead with political reform. The conflict in Syria is seen as a crucial test for Turkey as it struggles to carry out its newly muscular foreign policy in the region. Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union are all but dormant. The

64 See Maoz and Terris 2006.

65 Ravid, Barak. 2008. "Assad: Direct Talks with Israel Only After Bush Leaves Office." Haaretz, 8 July. Accessed 7 January 2011. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/assad-direct-talks-with-israelonly-after-bush-leaves-office-1.249280>.

66 "Stormy Debate in Davos over Gaza." 2009. Al-Jazeera, 29 January. Accessed 7 January 2012. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2009/01/20091291976879610.html>.

67 Ravid, Barak. 2009. "Netanyahu: Turkey can't be 'Honest Broker' in Syria Talks." Haaretz, 18 October. Accessed 7 January 2012. <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanyahuturkey-can-t-be-honest-broker-in-syria-talks-1.5940>.

68 "PM: France could Mediate Syria Talks." 2009. The Jerusalem Post, 15 November. Accessed 8 January 2012. <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=160462>.

69 See "Syria Warns of Mideast Instability amid Israel–Turkey Crisis." 2010. Hurriyet Daily News, 6 July. Accessed 27 March 2011. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=syria-warns-of-mideast-instability-amid-israel-turkey-crisis-2010-07-06>.

70 The article that originally used this term: Meral and Paris 2010.

conflict with Cyprus appears as intractable as ever. Efforts to reach a solution over Armenia are at an impasse. Diplomatic ties with Israel are frozen over an Israeli commando raid in May 2010 on a vessel that tried to reach Gaza from Turkey. Iran remains deeply suspicious of Turkey's agreement to host a NATO missile shield...At the same time, Turkish officials express concern that Syria, backed by Iran, could seek to embolden the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., as a means to punish Turkey for supporting the Syrian opposition.⁷¹

Related with the latter issue, at a time AKP drags its feet on resolving "the Kurdish question"⁷², as A. Zaman puts, the most immediate winners of PKK's liberation of Kobani, located at the Syrian-Turkish border, from Islamic State (IS) fighters have turned out to be PKK and its imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan, and the losers have been not only IS but Turkey as well.⁷³ As regional power Russia has gone more aggressive on Syria and intensified its alliance with PKK-affiliated PYD/YPG forces aftermath of Turkey's downing of Russian warplane on November 24, 2015, Turkey has entered in a much more "uncertain path", if not gloomy, both domestically and internationally.

Conclusion

The essential concern of this article was to explain the main motives that will continue to hold Middle Eastern nations from eliminating lack of harmony among them even at a time of relative ease. Many, including the authors of this paper, initially conceived in the "Arab Spring" of a long oppressed frustration with regional regimes and, perhaps, a readiness to push for an(y) alternative to the present political course in the Middle East. What is more a role model, such as Turkey, was available and seemed willing to hearten and back reformist-minded elite's transition toward functional democracies, eventually setting the pace of events toward building a Middle Eastern Security Community.

This article evinces that such an outcome is a distant possibility, at least for the time-being. Pessimistic as it may be, this work observes that three preconditions crucial for a pluralistic security community, under Turkey's headship, are nowhere to be found: the manipulation by "outsiders" remains one of the forces for deepening regional disputes. Thus far, no war erupted between Iran and Israel. Only because both Iran and Israel are convinced that timing has yet to come for a war with bearable consequences. Worst yet, the democratic reforms in Turkey appear to be losing its steam as of late. The primary

71 Bilefsky, Dan. 2012. "Despite Bold Talk on Syria, Turkey Sees Limits of Its Power." *New York Times*, 16 March. Accessed 17 March 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/17/world/europe/despite-bold-talk-on-syria-turkey-sees-limits-of-its-power.html?_r=1&ref=world.

72 Since its emergence from the ashes of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire in 1923, the Kurdish question as a trans-state ethnic conflict has been an "existential" threat for the modern Turkish nation-state with profound implications on its foreign policy. See: Kirişçi and Winrow 1997; Gökey 2005; Updegraff 2012.

73 Zaman, Amberin 2015. "Kurdishvictory in Kobanide feat for Turkish Policy." *Al-Monitor*, 28 January 2015. Accessed 5 May 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/turkey-kurds-kobani-defeat-turkish-policy.html#ixzz3alhV9TME>.

consequence of this will soon spell itself as a declining credibility of Turkey across the region, deterioration in Turkey's state–state affairs with key actors, and Turkey's joining into, but not bringing solution to, ethnic and religious disputes.

All in all, Turkey is destitute of a domestic authority to come by these non-material foreign policy instruments: international prestige, self-restraint and the credibility as an honest peace-broker. A functional constitutional democratic system is what it takes to produce these three foreign policy assets, yet the AKP is growing increasingly incapable or perhaps unwilling, to further the process of democratization beyond its current incomplete phase. At the current stage, the most likely impetus to transform Turkey's "uncertain path"⁷⁴, if not gloomy, for good is to come up with a more democratic constitution with checks and balances.

74 For regional turmoil following the warplane downing crisis and Turkey's impasse, see; Iseri, 2016.

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