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Turkey and the Arab Spring: Embracing "People's Power"

Gallia Lindenstrauss

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Introduction

The Arab Spring, while still an ongoing process, has already been the cause of transformation in North Africa and the Middle East. Long-lasting regimes have fallen and a certain reshuffling of alliances in the Middle East has taken place. Turkey has found itself in some respects to be in the middle of many of the developments. This is mainly due to its own aspirations for a growing role in international affairs but also due to rising expectations of it in the region and beyond.

A visible development in recent years has been Turkey's attempts to regain influence in the Middle East and to improve its relations with the Arab world. Prior to the awakening in the Arab world, there seemed to be indifference on the part of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) leaders as to what sort of governing system existed in the Muslim countries with which Turkey was improving relations. This has changed during the course of the Arab Spring. Turkey has embraced the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East and has called for the establishment of governments that will have popular support and legitimacy. For example, in an interview with *The New York Times,* Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu proclaimed regarding Turkish-Egyptian future relations: "It will be an axis of democracy of the two biggest nations in our region, from the north to the south, from the Black Sea down to the Nile Valley in Sudan."[1] In can be argued that Turkey has in fact moved from a Zero Problems policy with Turkish neighbors to a Zero Problems policy with the people in neighboring countries.

The policy of embracing people's power can be seen as a novel development in Turkish foreign policy. As such, it is intriguing not only to try and trace its development but also important to assess the chances that this policy will continue to govern Turkish policies in the future. This embrace of people's power is also interesting in the context in which many point to Turkey as a possible model for the "Arab Spring countries". Thus, Turkey is facing the challenge of accepting and encouraging change, while also reaching out and trying to serve as a model.

This paper seeks to explore this new emphasis on Turkish foreign policy and its possible ramifications for Turkey's relations with various actors, also beyond the countries in the Arab world which have gone through a transformation. In order to achieve this aim, a brief background on both Turkish initial reactions to the Arab awakening and Turkish foreign policy under the AKP will first be given. Following this, the notion of the Turkish model will be discussed. The next section will address the impact that the Arab Spring is already having and is likely to continue to have on Turkish relations with various actors in the Middle East and beyond. The paper will conclude with some policy implications.

1. *The New York Times,* 18th September 2011.

Background

Turkey and the Arab Spring: Initial Responses

Like other countries, Turkey was caught by surprise by the developments of the Arab Spring. Its initial responses were incoherent and showed confusion, especially the "U-turn" concerning developments in Libya. At first, Turkey vocally objected to international intervention in the conflict but later was one of the NATO countries that had a supporting role in the operation. When events in Libya began in February 2011 and there were initial calls for international action, Turkey declared its objection to the interference in the domestic affairs of Libya. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that "military intervention by NATO in Libya or any other country would be totally counter-productive… We have seen from other examples that foreign interventions, especially military interventions, only deepen the problem."[2] This position can also be explained by the fact that there were more than 20,000 Turkish citizens in Libya at the time, mainly working in construction, and that there were many business contracts signed with Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

The fact that the humanitarian intervention in Libya was authorized by a Security Council resolution, after a call from the Arab League to impose a no-fly zone and was under the umbrella of NATO command, eased Turkey's consent[3] as Turkey has been a strong supporter in recent years of multilateral action. In February, Turkey launched a massive operation to evacuate its citizens from Libya, so it no longer had this element to worry about. Erdoğan made a point of stressing that Turkish military personnel would not shoot anyone on the ground. Turkey only sent naval ships and a submarine to patrol the Libyan shores, and fighter jets to help enforce the no-fly zone over Libya.

Regarding Egypt, Turkey's position was more consistent and Erdoğan was one of the first international leaders to call for the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak. While this can be considered a bold move, it should be stressed that relations between Ankara and Cairo were tense during Mubarak's and Erdoğan's rule, mainly with respect to Turkey's growing role in the Middle East and Turkish criticism towards Egypt's policy with regard to Gaza (Salem, 2010). Less than a month after the fall of Mubarak, Turkish President Abdullah Gül came to Egypt with the aim of expressing solidarity with the Egyptian people.[4]

Developments in Syria proved most problematic to Turkey. Syria was a prominent example of the Zero Problems policy that Turkey had tried to promote vis-à-vis its neighbors in recent years. Yet just as Turkish policy toward Libya has changed, so too has Turkey's approach to Syrian policies. Since the beginning of the riots, when Erdoğan phoned Bashar al-Assad every day and only called for the implementation of major reforms, there has been a significant change for the worse in relations, and Turkey has been one of the more vocal players in insisting that al-Assad step down. Davutoğlu said regarding this change of policy: "We wanted [al-Assad] to be the Gorbachev of Syria, but he chose to be Milosevic."[5] While events in Syria began in March, it was only in November that Erdoğan for the first time

2. *Today's Zaman,* 15th March 2011.
3. BBC News, 25th March 2011.
4. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 3rd February 2011.
5. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 10th February 2012.

publicly called upon al-Assad to step down and added: "For the love of God, who are you fighting with? Fighting your own people until the death is not heroism. It's cowardice. If you want to see someone who fights his people to the death, look at Nazi Germany, look at Hitler, look at Mussolini."[6]

While from time to time Turkey stated that the option of military intervention in Syria was also on the table and that it is ready for any scenario,[7] it was not enthusiastic about this course of action (Balci, 2012). Even carrying out its threats against al-Assad and deciding upon sanctions against Syria took Turkey quite a while. Only after the Arab League decided to impose sanctions against Syria in late November did Turkey follow and in a more subtle manner. It emphasized that its sanctions were not directed against the Syrian people and that vital supplies like water and electricity were not included in them.[8]

Uprisings in Bahrain have also worried Turkey as they put Iran and Saudi Arabia in direct confrontation and were highlighting the Shiite-Sunni divide, a divide Turkey wishes to downplay. Davutoğlu tried to mediate during the crisis and had contacts in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Erdoğan, while talking about the violence in Bahrain, said in a speech that Turkey did not want a "new Karbalas" in reference to a tragic battle that took place in the 7th century during which Imam Hussein, grandson of Islam's founding prophet, Muhammad, was slain.[9] The battle is considered to be one of the causes of the historical split between Shiites and Sunnis.

In September 2011, Erdoğan visited Egypt, Tunisia and Libya and was received with great initial enthusiasm in all these states. Erdoğan's "Arab Spring Tour" reflected the attempts of Turkey to utilize its soft power and its growing economic abilities. At the end of December 2011, Turkey and Egypt conducted a major joint naval exercise called the "Sea of Friendship".[10] In January 2012, Turkey's state-owned export credit agency promised to provide loans amounting to $750 million to reconstruction efforts in Tunisia and Libya.[11]

Turkish Foreign Policy Prior to the Arab Spring

In order to understand the background of the changes in Turkish foreign policy following the Arab Spring one must first address the principles of Turkish foreign policy during the years the Justice and Development Party has been in power. The Zero Problems policy was intended to deal with the territorially adjunct countries neighboring Turkey. The logic behind this policy was that stability and economic prosperity will create the necessary conditions in which Turkey's trade will thrive. From an economic perspective, Turkey has an interest in enhancing its relations with Middle Eastern countries both for the purpose of gaining new markets and for the purpose of ensuring the steady and reliable supply of energy to Turkey (Almuedo, 2011: 16).

6. Reuters, 22nd November 2011.
7. Reuters, 29th November 2011.
8. *The New York Times,* 30th November 2011.
9. *Today's Zaman,* 18th March 2011.
10. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 9th January 2012.
11. *Today's Zaman,* 24th January 2012.

The Zero Problems policy had some successes. Turkey pressured the Turkish Cypriots to agree to the Annan Plan in 2004 and this also eased some of the tensions with Greece. Moreover, there was the signing of the 2009 protocols between Turkey and Armenia, the warming of relations with Syria that included Turkish mediation between Israel and Syria, and the warming of relations with Iran that included Turkish mediation surrounding the nuclear issue. The Zero Problems policy can also be seen as successful from the perspective of the rise in Turkish trade with Middle Eastern countries.[12]

The Zero Problems policy was part of a bigger Turkish foreign policy agenda, the Strategic Depth doctrine led by Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu's main emphasis was that Turkey should make more and develop further its soft power in territories that were part of the Ottoman Empire and that its pivotal location at the crossroads between continents should also be used better. In the Strategic Depth doctrine, Davutoğlu criticized previous Turkish governments and claimed that by rejecting the relevancy of the Ottoman legacy they have neglected elements that could contribute to an increase in Turkey's significance in the international system (Murinson, 2006: 947-948; Walker, 2007: 33-34).

There were, however, also critics of the changes in Turkish foreign policy. There were those who claimed that Turkey had moved East, and even joined the "Axis of Evil". Turkish policy makers tried to argue that better relations between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries were not at the expense of Turkey's relations with the West but rather should actually add to the attractiveness of Turkey in the eyes of its Western allies[13] (Kucera, 2010). Others have claimed that the new foreign policy of the AKP can be characterized as Neo-Ottomanism and that it also reflects an overly-ambitious foreign policy agenda (Kardaş, 2010: 131). Davutoğlu rejected such statements and claimed that those who accuse Turkey of Neo-Ottomanism do so to spread fear of Turkey and that these sorts of proclamations reflect uneasiness with Turkey's power.[14]

It can be argued that the Zero Problems policy, at least toward Syria, has been one of the causes of the Arab Spring taking root in this country. For example, the removal of the requirement for travel visas made Turkey more accessible and more Syrians got the chance to see with their own eyes the difference between the countries. Turkish soap operas that have become extremely popular all over the Arab world may have also had a destabilizing effect (Kirişci, 2011: 41). Whether this was an intended or an unintended consequence of the Zero Problems policy is an interesting question that does not yet have a clear answer. While in retrospect some would also like to emphasize the political dimension, it is clear that the main dimensions of this policy were economic and security-related.

12. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 20th June 2010.
13. *The Guardian,* 26th October 2009.
14. *Today's Zaman,* 28th August 2011.

The Turkish Model

The Arab Spring has brought into the forefront the "Turkish model" and discussions about its applicability to the countries going through transformation in the region. While many highlight the uniqueness of the Turkish experience, for example its close relationship with the West and its aspirations to join the European Union (Jung, 2011: 8), others stress the basic affinity between the Justice and Development Party and the Muslim Brothers' affiliated parties throughout the region.

One must be cautious when referring to the Turkish model. At times it is not clear to which Turkish model people are referring. Different people use this concept in diverse manners. This concept has also evolved over the years. While in the past it would not be uncommon to refer to the Turkish model and also address the special and problematic role the Turkish army had in preserving the secular nature of Turkish politics, this is a reference that many would shy away from today. While some will try to highlight the laicism element, others will claim that not only was it a false perspective to begin with when addressing Turkish politics but that Turkey is moving away from this element and hence cannot serve as an example in this respect. For many, the Turkish model is a mix of Islam, democracy and market economy but the degree of each element in the mix is in debate.

During his visit to Egypt in September, Erdoğan surprised many when he emphasized a model of secular democracy for Egypt. He stated that a devoted Muslim like himself could successfully rule a secular country and that "our understating" of laicism is that the state should respect everybody's belief or non-belief and remain at an equal distance from all of them. This call was received well in the West and in Turkey but it was rejected, for example, by the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. It has been claimed that Erdoğan felt the need to emphasize secularism in his attempt to prevent the rise of sectarian violence in the Arab world.

Whether the Turkish model is applicable to even some of the Arab Spring countries or not remains an open question (Dede, 2011: 29-32). Even if the Turkish model is applicable there is the issue of whether Turkey "will be able to deliver." This question should be divided into two. First, how much support will Turkey be able to give the countries that are going through transition? Second, what are the dangers facing Turkish democracy and are they tainting the Turkish model? With regard to the first question, while Turkish foreign assistance has been on the rise,[15] Erdoğan has been careful not to place too much stress on a proactive role for Turkey in countries that are looking into the Turkish model. In an interview with *TIME Magazine,* he stated: "We are not intentionally trying to export a regime – we couldn't care less. But if they want our help, we'll provide any assistance they need. But we do not have a mentality of exporting our system."[16]

With regard to the second question over whether Turkey is truly committed to democratic principles, there are serious concerns in certain circles in Turkey itself and in the West regarding the direction Turkey is taking. It seems as if the reform process which Turkey has been going through as part of

15. *Today's Zaman,* 26th January 2011.
16. *TIME Magazine,* 26th September 2011.

its attempts to become a member state of the European Union has basically stalled. Claims regarding Erdoğan's autocratic tendencies, the high number of Turkish journalists who have been arrested in recent times and the continuing problems with minority rights in Turkey and specifically the Kurdish question are among the issues that have been raised in criticism of the continuing rule of the AKP. In its third term in office, the ruling party will be able to dismiss some of these concerns if it manages to draft a new constitution and if it gets wide support for its suggestions. Without an agreed upon new constitution or at least additional substantial amendments, the future of the Turkish model within Turkey in its present form will be less clear. However, some argue that it is exactly the imperfectness of the Turkish model that makes it more appealing to the Arab world in comparison to the consolidated democracies in the West (Kirişci, 2011: 40; Ülgen, 2011: 14-15).

With all these caveats in mind, it is even the mere fact that the Turkish model for the Arab Spring countries is so frequently discussed that is adding to Turkish soft power. In the Brookings 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll (Telhami, 2011), when respondents in Egypt were asked which political system they would like their political system to resemble, 44% gave Turkey as their first choice (number two was France with 10%).

In this context, it should also be mentioned that while the Turkish model rests on more than just Erdoğan's or the AKP's popularity, they do have a significant appeal by themselves in the Arab world. In the Brookings poll, 31% of the respondents in Egypt answered that Erdoğan was the leader they would most like their next president to resemble (Telhami, 2011). In all five countries surveyed (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates), Erdoğan ranked first as the most admired leader, with 22% of the respondents naming him as such. This result is also very close to the figure of 21% of respondents who stated the same in 2010, hence the effect of the Arab Spring has not been dramatic with regard to Erdoğan's popularity and rests mostly on his pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel stand (Telhami, 2011).

The AKP's outside popularity can be seen from the fact that political parties in other states have chosen to call themselves by similar names. For example, the Justice and Development Party in Morocco and Pakistan chose this name prior to the Arab Spring, while the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt and the Syrian Movement for Justice and Development which have organized in light of the transformations in these countries have done the same.

The Impact of the Arab Spring on Turkish Foreign Relations

While it is important to analyze Turkey's relations with the countries going through transformation, there is also a need to address the question of how the Arab Spring in general and specifically the policy of embracing people's power is affecting Turkey's relations with other actors. In some cases it seems that it is not the Arab Spring that is the main denominator of the current state of relations. However, it is in the context of this transformation that some of the existing tensions or shared interests are more notable. Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern states will be first discussed followed by a consideration of Turkey's relations with other international actors.

The Arab Spring and Turkish-Iranian Relations

By and large the developments of the Arab Spring have thus far negatively affected Turkish-Iranian relations. While these relations were never free of tensions (Lindenstrauss and Guzansky, 2011), the Zero Problems policy of Turkey and its growing energy needs, on the one hand, and the ramifications of the international sanctions inflicted on Iran to stop it from developing its nuclear program, on the other, have brought the sides closer in recent years. This has somewhat changed during the course of the Arab Spring.

Turkey and Iran had emerged as being on opposite sides regarding events in Syria. While Syria is one of Iran's closest allies, Turkey has stepped up its criticism of the al-Assad regime's brutal repression of dissent. Still, Turkey only imposed sanctions on Syria following the Arab League's decision and while not rejecting the military intervention option has been rather weary of it. It can be argued that in fact Iran has managed until now to deter Turkey from greater and direct involvement in Syria.

In general, the Turkish emphasis on people's power can be interpreted as extremely problematic in Iranian eyes, as some claim that in fact the Arab Spring started in Iran in 2009 with the failed Green Revolution. Moreover, as the Turkish model and the Iranian model have in some respects been competing models and as it seems the Turkish model is much more popular nowadays, this also adds to a sense of rivalry between the two states.

The strain in relations surrounding the Syrian issue adds to the fact that Turkish-Iranian relations are also highly affected by developments in the Iranian nuclear program and the growing tensions in the region associated with this program. Turkey has resumed attempts to mediate between Iran and the West and stresses that a military strike against Iran will have catastrophic results. Turkey is very weary of the growing Shiite-Sunni divide and of the consequences of the mounting concern in many Sunni-dominated states from the ramifications of a nuclear Iran. In this respect, the Turkish Foreign Minister warned that "there are some circles who wish to begin a Cold War on the axis of Sunni-Shiite tension whose effects would last for decades."[17] Some of these concerns would have

17. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 5th January 2012.

existed regardless of the Arab Spring but, in a strategic environment that is rapidly changing, it seems as if the atmosphere is extremely volatile.

The Arab Spring and Turkish-Saudi Relations

Turkish-Saudi relations have been complex over the years and have not developed to their full potential. While Saudi Arabia is also suspicious of Turkey's overall embracing of the Arab Spring revolutions, the two countries did see eye to eye regarding developments in Syria. While the Saudis see developments in Syria as a way to pull it away from Iranian influence, the Turks have been mainly critical about the violence the al-Assad regime is employing in its attempts to crush the revolt. It is also the advancement in the Iranian nuclear program and the consequences of US withdrawal from Iraq that are bringing Turkey and Saudi Arabia closer. Again, this is a dynamic that would most likely have happened regardless of the Arab Spring revolutions but it is in the context of these revolutions that Turkey and Saudi Arabia understand more than in the past the joint interests they have.

In their attempts to deal with Iranian threats to disturb energy supply, the Saudis have been discussing with Turkey the selling of oil at a lower price and a guarantee of supply in case the Iranians decide to disrupt oil supply. This is especially important for Turkey as 51% of its crude oil imports are from Iran.[18]

It is also the fact the Saudis are finding the Arab Spring countries as more dangerous investments and the good performance of the Turkish economy that is making Turkey a much more appealing option for Saudi investments.[19] This growing economic cooperation will most likely have a positive impact on the ability of the sides to better cooperate in the political sphere.

Still, difficulties that have existed in this relationship in the past are likely to continue hampering the ability to fully cooperate. In addition, while both Turkey and Saudi Arabia see Iran's advances toward nuclear weapons as problematic, Saudis see this as a much more serious security threat. Also, while Turkey's approach has been to encourage dialogue with Iran, Saudi Arabia has adopted a much more confrontational stance.

The Arab Spring and Turkish-Iraqi Relations

The main factor influencing Turkish-Iraqi relations are the consequences of the 2003 Gulf War, and more specifically the consequences of the 2011 US withdrawal. However, the Arab Spring has made the Turkish strategic situation on its southeast borders more complicated. Turkey now faces the threat that two of its neighboring countries will disintegrate. The consequences of the disintegration of Iraq and Syria can be highly problematic for Turkey, as it might cause refugee flows into Turkey and might bring the Kurdish problem in Turkey to a new climax. Moreover, the growth in Turkish trade with Middle

18. *The Guardian,* 6th February 2012.
19. *Today's Zaman,* 25th December 2011.

Eastern countries has in some respects been dependent on transport routes through Syria and Iraq. The worsening security situation in these countries and the possible need to bypass them might add additional costs that will be harder to sustain.[20]

While in the past it would have been difficult to imagine such a degree of cooperation between Turkey and the Kurds in Northern Iraq, this has become one of the consequences of the US toppling Saddam Hussein's regime. Turkey's ability to forge good relations with the Kurdish Regional Government has created the background that now enables Turkey to somewhat create a counter-balance to the growing influence of Iran over developments in Iraq (Barkey, 2011: 46). For example, there was much tension between Turkey and Iraq following the arrest warrant issued in December 2011 for Iraq's most senior Sunni politician, Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi.[21] Turkey objects to what is seen as Maliki's sectarian politics, and this move against the Vice-President is considered as evidence of Iranian influence over Iraq's Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, who is Shiite.

The dramatic changes that have taken place in Iraq since 2003 have created a situation in which by and large the Arab Spring did not have a direct effect on Iraq. The by-product of the Arab Spring that is having its effect on Iraq is the growing Shiite-Sunni divide. Moreover, a possible result of the developments in Syria and of the fact that Syria can no longer serve as Iran's ally the way it used to is the growing importance of Iraq in the Iranian perspective.

The Arab Spring and Turkish-Israeli Relations

The deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations is a process that started before the Arab Spring, and has had its own dynamic since the Flotilla Affair in May 2010 for the first time put Israel and Turkey in direct confrontation. While several developments during the Arab Spring, such as Turkey distancing itself from Syria and the strengthening of Turkish-US relations could have brought Israel and Turkey closer, and while both sides seemed to be willing to compromise before the leaking of the Palmer Report, at the end of the day a deal to resolve the Flotilla Affair was not achieved – suggesting that in both countries there is much resentment and anger towards the other side. The Turkish public cannot understand why Israel refuses to apologize for the killing of Turkish citizens. Israel thinks Turkey is trying to build its regional status by emphasizing its anti-Israel rhetoric and actions. While Erdoğan has stressed several times that Turkey does not have a problem with the Israeli people but only with its government,[22] in fact Israeli public opinion has also strongly turned against Turkey, as exemplified in the sharp decrease in Israeli tourists going to Turkey.[23]

Nevertheless, there are connections between developments in Turkish-Israeli relations and the Arab Spring and vice versa. The crowd that attacked the Israeli embassy in Cairo in September 2011 was also inspired by the downgrading of relations between Turkey and Israel, and indeed at least some

20. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 29th November 2011.
21. *Today's Zaman,* 16th January 2012.
22. *Today's Zaman,* 4th June 2010.
23. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 17th November 2011.

analysts in Israel did warn in advance that Egypt and Jordan will have a hard time maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel if Turkey severs its relations with Israel.

Developments in the Arab Spring and Turkey's embracing of people's power can be problematic for Israel because there are strong anti-Israel feelings in the Arab/Muslim world. Turkish foreign policy towards Israel reflects the strong pro-Palestinian feelings of the Turkish general public. While these feelings are not new, they are now more reflected in the policies toward Israel. In fact, it can be claimed that Turkey's first embrace of people's power in the Middle East has been its strong support for the Palestinian struggle. Moreover, Turkey emphasizes the importance of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for achieving the goal of regional stability. In an op-ed article in *The New York Times,* President Gül claimed that achieving a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is critical in determining whether the current wave of unrest in the Arab world will lead to more democracy and peace or to the establishment of tyrannical regimes and conflict.[24]

Contrary to earlier periods, Israel no longer has a strong regional ally in the Middle East. While in the past Israel enjoyed good relations with Iran and later with Turkey and in recent times with Mubarak's regime, it is now more isolated. There are shared interests between Israel and Saudi Arabia, such as their strong objection to Iran's nuclear program, but there are also many obstacles for these relations to develop to the sort of alliance Israel shared with Turkey in the 1990s.

However, the difficulties Turkey and Israel are facing with their neighbors does give the countries more ground to cooperate. In the past both tensions in Turkish-Syrian relations and deterioration in the intra-state conflict with the Kurds have brought Turkey and Israel closer. In both states the sides are interested in at least maintaining some degree of working relations. Whether Israel and Turkey will manage to overcome the current crisis remains an open question, but the negative effects of the deterioration of relations has already been substantial, at least on the Israeli side.

The Arab Spring and Turkey's Relations with Hamas and the Palestinian Authority

While there has not been a Palestinian Spring in the current awakening in the Arab countries, the Arab Spring has also brought about changes in the Palestinian arena. Turkey has strongly supported the Palestinian bid for United Nations membership. In a meeting at the Arab League in September 2011, Erdoğan declared: "It's time to raise the Palestinian flag at the United Nations. Let's raise the Palestinian flag and let that flag be the symbol of peace and justice in the Middle East."[25] Davutoğlu has even stated that "the US veto on the recognition of Palestine was wrong as was the Russian veto on Syria."[26]

24. *The New York Times,* 20th April 2011.
25. BBC News, 13th September 2011.
26. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 10th February 2012.

The electoral success of political parties associated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the countries going through transformation has prepared the ground for making Hamas a more legitimate actor to conduct talks with. This is something the Turkish government has been in support of for a long time. For example, in a TV interview in May 2011 Erdoğan stated: "I don't see Hamas as a terror organization. Hamas is a political party."[27] Turkey has considered it a grave mistake that some of the major international actors have refused to publicly negotiate with Hamas (Aras, 2009).

The Arab Spring has brought about the breaking of ice between the Fatah and Hamas movements. The unity deal that was achieved with Egyptian mediation between Fatah and Hamas has been a development that was positively viewed by Turkey. Erdoğan has hailed this development and said it was an essential step toward Middle East peace.[28] Davutoğlu, who also attended the signing ceremony of the unity deal in Egypt, stated in June 2011: "Turkey will do anything in its power for this reconciliation."[29] While there might have been some disappointment in Turkey over the fact that it was Egypt and not Turkey that brought about the unity deal (and also the Shalit deal for the release the abducted Israeli soldier), both members of Hamas and members of Fatah have still stressed the importance of Turkey in facilitating these developments.

Of all its relations with Middle East counterparts, Turkey feels the most comfortable in its relations with the Palestinians. This is not only because of the fact that opposing Israeli occupation is a cause that unites people in the Muslim world but also that the Palestinians have shown relatively more democratic tendencies than what has been occurring, at least prior to the Arab Spring, in other Arab states.

The Arab Spring and Turkish-Jordanian Relations

While many were sure that Arab Spring-like developments would also occur in Jordan, the country was relatively quiet. Developments in the Arab Spring until now have shown that the monarchic regimes are comparatively more stable than other autocratic regimes. Saudi Arabia is trying to strengthen the monarchies in the region by planning to add Jordan and Morocco to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). While this will fortify Saudi influence over Jordan, Turkey has also improved relations in recent years with the GCC.

The Jordanian economy has been negatively impacted by the developments of the Arab Spring, mainly because of the impact the instability in Egypt and Syria is having on Jordan. Among these effects has been the decrease of tourists coming to joint tourist programs in Syria, Egypt and Jordan.[30] Turkey is not likely to compete with Saudi Arabia in terms of the economic aid given to Jordan, but it can continue with attempts to facilitate bilateral and regional trade.

27. Turkish News, 13th May 2011.
28. Turkish News, 13th May 2011.
29. *Setatimes,* 23rd June 2011.
30. *Hürriyet Daily News,* 17th November 2011.

As one of the ways to dispel instability from the kingdom, Jordan has attempted to re-launch the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. While direct talks between the sides were held for the first time in 15 months, they did not result in any move forward.[31] As Turkey sees progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as extremely important, any attempt to revive talks may be seen as positive in their eyes. There is, however, Turkey's wish to play a role in such negotiations, something that the present state of relations between Turkey and Israel does not enable.

While currently Turkey and Jordan still enjoy good relations, some concerns can be raised with regard to the future. Turkey, which has presented itself as the champion of the Palestinian cause, will find it hard to remain indifferent if the Palestinians in Jordan decide to directly challenge the Hashemite regime.

The Arab Spring and Turkish-US Relations

Turkish-US relations have seen many ups and downs in the last decade. One of the legacies of the Bush Jr. era has been strained Turkish-US relations. However, already in the last years of the Bush era, there was some improvement of relations and the election of Barack Obama has been viewed as a positive development in Turkish eyes. This initial hope for a significant change for the better in relations was somewhat shuttered when Turkey voted in 2010 against a US-led resolution in the Security Council on further sanctions on Iran. However, this low point could be explained by a misunderstanding between Turkey and the US. While Turkey thought it had US encouragement to try and broker a deal with Iran, the terms of the deal that was reached with Iran, in collaboration with Brazil, were very far from what the US was willing to agree to (Tanir, 2011: 73-74). The deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations, especially following the Flotilla Affair, also negatively affected Turkish-US relations prior to the Arab Spring (Eralp, 2011: 204).

In light of a more independent Turkish foreign policy, questions like "Who lost Turkey?" and "Is Turkey moving East?" were being asked in Washington and other Western capitals. These questions and the criticism voiced within them on Turkish foreign policy were causing in themselves additional strains in relations (Kardaş, 2010: 115; Tocci, 2011: 56).

The Arab Spring has changed these dynamics, at least for now. The awakening in the Arab world has brought Turkish-US relations to a new high, and it is also the personal relationship that has been forged between Obama and Erdoğan that is having a strong positive effect. In an interview with *TIME Magazine,* Obama mentioned Erdoğan as one of the five leaders with which he has established relations based on confidence and trust.[32] Turkey's appeal also rests on the fact that some of the other US allies in the Middle East have weakened or have become less dependable in US eyes. In addition, US withdrawal from Iraq has also made Turkey a more important component of US grand strategy towards the Middle East.

31. Al Jazeera, 3rd January 2012.
32. *TIME Magazine,* 19th January 2012.

Still, there are some questions regarding the future of strong relations between the US and Turkey. There is much anti-American sentiment in Turkey itself and also in other Middle Eastern countries. Turkey's growing emphasis on people's power will inevitably have to reflect at least some of these feelings. This emphasis may remain only at the rhetorical level, but this may not prove enough to satisfy those who voice these feelings. Turkey also wishes to continue with its emphasis on a more independent foreign policy. This will likely create other situations in which Turkey and the US will be on the opposite ends in the United Nations and other international forums.

Turkey and the European Union Following the Arab Spring

The awakening in the Arab world has once again highlighted the fact that enlarging Europe by including Turkey will bring it closer to the instability of the Middle Eastern region, which for some in Europe causes more Turco-skepticism. Moreover, as it seems that the Arab Spring will result in a lengthy process of transformation in the Middle East which might also involve many setbacks it is a development that has to be taken into consideration in the long-term scenarios concerning Turkey and the EU.

But the fact that there has been change in the Arab world and that several autocratic regimes have fallen has in some respects brought Europe and the Arab world ideationally closer. To be sure, the main beneficiaries of the revolts thus far are the religious parties and this may be linked in a negative way to existing European mistrust towards Islamist parties. Still, in most of the Arab Spring countries, the Islamic parties will have to form a coalition; thus there will also be more room for liberal values to take root in these countries.

Part of the paradoxical appeal of the Turkish model for the Arab Spring countries is the fact Turkey is an EU candidate state (Eralp, 2011: 205). The stall in negotiations with the EU and the possibility that at some point one or both sides will despair might cause a break not only in Turkish-EU relations but will also be seen as a very disappointing development in Arab public opinion (Benli Altunişik, 2010: 18-19; Kirişci, 2011: 49). This was true before the Arab Spring and still remains so. If the possible impasse in negotiations with the EU results in the continuing slowdown of democratic reforms in Turkey this might taint the popularity of the Turkish model.

While, according to public opinion polls, Turkey has always been closer to Western values than some of its critics in Europe would like to admit (Smith, 2009: 25), following the adoption of the people's power perspective on Turkish foreign policy, this similarity might also be more pronounced than in the past in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey, however, lacks the European experience of developing tools that will enable it to promote democratic transitions in other countries. As Verheugen argues, the EU and Turkey should join forces in trying to assist the countries going through revo-

lutions during the transitional period (Verheugen, 2012: 5; Kirişci, 2011: 47) as the EU has the expertise with promoting change in other countries and Turkey has better access to the region on cultural and religious grounds.

Of the EU states, the most noteworthy developments related to the Arab Spring have occurred in the relations between Turkey and France. There were notable tensions concerning France's early push towards intervention in Libya, and there were also claims that French President Nicolas Sarkozy's and British Prime Minister David Cameron's surprise visit to Libya in September 2011 was an intentional attempt to precede Erdoğan's visit to that country.[33] However, the two states did seem to see eye to eye for some time about the developments in Syria and it seemed in November 2011 they were even jointly pushing for the creation of a buffer zone or a humanitarian corridor in Syria. Since then, the passing in the French parliament of a law criminalizing the denial of the Armenian genocide has caused a sharp deterioration in French-Turkish relations. The French Foreign Minister, Alain Juppé, expressed his regret regarding this deterioration and stated that "Turkey is an ally of France and a strategic partner," with regard to their cooperation in NATO and in the G20 to address the crisis in Syria, Afghanistan and security issues in the Mediterranean.[34]

Turkish-Russian Relations Following the Arab Spring

The developments in the Arab Spring have caused strains in Turkish-Russian relations. While historically extremely problematic relations existed between the two entities, it was the end of the Cold War, Turkey's growing energy needs, its dependency on natural gas imports and its greater defiance of the West that have caused a relaxation of tensions between Turkey and Russia.

Still, Russia's counter-revolutionary stance towards the developments in the Arab Spring (Baev, 2011: 11-13) has brought Turkey and Russia to be on opposite sides of the divide. Russia, which agreed to allowed Security Council Resolution 1973 regarding protecting civilians in Libya to pass, later criticized the fact that the operation in Libya turned out to be an operation of regime change. This was brought up as one of the reasons because of which Russia objects to any outside international intervention in Syria. After Russia and China vetoed a Security Council Resolution on Syria, Davutoğlu criticized the "Cold War reflexes" of the two states.[35]

The Arab Spring developments have brought Turkey closer again to the West, as manifested for example in Turkey's willingness to host one of the radar systems of the NATO missile defense systems. This is a negative trend from a Russian perspective. Turkey has tried to emphasize that the NATO missile defense system should not be seen as directed to deal with a specific threat, but this is not the way this system is viewed in Russia (nor in Iran). But it should be stressed that, at the more basic level, Turkey's emphasis in recent years on multilateral action is one that does

33. *Today's Zaman,* 16th September 2011.
34. Alarabiya News, 23rd December 2011.
35. *Today's Zaman,* 5th February 2012.

give Russia the opportunity to be more active. This does not mean that Turkey and Russia see eye to eye on specific issues, but rather that Turkey’s emphasis on mechanisms in which Russia still has significant power benefits it.

Conclusion

Turkey's embracing of people's power can be seen as a development of its emphasis on enhancing Turkish soft power in recent years. Turkey can promote certain policies by taking advantage of the popularity of the Turkish model in the Arab world. However, the relevancy of this model to the Arab Spring countries is perhaps less clear than it would seem on the face of it. There are also some contradictions in the appealing aspects of the Turkish model.

The policy of embracing people's power is a value-based prism for a foreign policy which is also very pragmatic in nature because of the growing needs of the Turkish economy and the escalating tensions in the Middle East. Yet some of the contradictions in implementing this policy have already existed in previous Turkish policies. The uprisings and their regional impact will also necessarily bring about a period of reorganization, which by its nature will be a sensitive time that will involve a greater chance of violence and is also liable to be accompanied by an economic slowdown, hence requiring at times a more cautious and defensive Turkish foreign policy than its leaders may wish.

Somewhat paradoxically, while Turkey is now stressing its support of people's power and discussions are held on the relevancy of the Turkish model to the Arab Spring countries, both pointing to Turkey's continuing emphasis on soft power, Turkey has reverted in the last year to exercising hard power. A notable example is the increased Turkish naval activity in the Eastern Mediterranean that is presenting a clear threat to Israel and Cyprus. Some have argued that from the start it was difficult for Turkey to promote a soft power policy in a region in which hard power seems to be the more prevailing form of action. Moreover, Turkey has a strong tradition of emphasizing hard power politics that was very difficult to break away from.

The major open question regarding the future is over the results of the Arab Spring revolutions. It will, of course, be easier for Turkey to deal with those states in which the revolution ended with a more or less definite result, such as Tunisia. If the Arab Spring results in more states adopting some degree of the democratic model, then Turkey's emphasis on people's power can even be seen as visionary. If the revolutions fail and there are new autocratic regimes, then the relevancy of soft power initiatives by Turkey remains less clear and Turkey is likely to return to its previous policies in which it said little regarding the regimes it was cooperating with. If more hybrid situations are the outcome of the Arab Spring, then the more likely result is that the implementation of policies will be selective and contradictory. Another question is whether the region is going to witness a new round of uprisings. This will again have an impact on the form of Turkish action and perhaps complicate further attempts to build a more structured Turkish foreign policy.

Turkey has managed in recent years to benefit from occurrences that seemed at first to weaken it. This is true regarding the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 to which Turkey strongly objected and feared

its effects, and this seems to also be true for the current uprisings that have caused some of the regimes Turkey cooperated with in the past to weaken and fall. Turkey has been able to achieve a lot because of its proactive policy and at times daring moves. This is in sharp contrast to its passive and reactive policies during most of the Cold War. The prism of embracing people’s power is a novel one in Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, there will be a questioning of this policy both inside and outside Turkey. Still, it might lead to new thinking on Turkey and its role in the international system and as such might assist in bringing to an end some of the current deadlocks in Turkey’s relations with the West.

Policy Implications

- Encouraging Turkey to remain committed to the reform process that it has embarked upon in recent years can have positive effects not just in Turkey itself but also in the countries going through transformation in North Africa and the Middle East.

- Despite the ambiguity of the term the "Turkish model", it generates a positive perception which makes sense to different audiences in diverse manners. Hence, trying to offer precise definitions might actually hinder those who want to promote Turkey as a model.

- The Turkish model rests on more than just Erdoğan's or the AKP's popularity. However, Erdoğan and the AKP have an appealing aspect that is hard to ignore and hence they should be constructively engaged in the broad attempt to assist the Arab states going through a transformation period.

- Turkey's ability to continue with its emphasis on people's power will depend more on occurrences in the Arab Spring countries than on the quality of Turkish policies. It should not come as a surprise if there are contradictions in implementing this policy as it is novel in the context of Turkey and also the uncertainties regarding the transformation in the Middle East hinder its implementation.

- The West and especially the US should build upon the current momentum in which the developments in the Arab Spring have brought the West and Turkey closer once again.

- The prism of Turkey's embracing of people's power can be used to highlight the similarities of the value system in Turkey to that of the West.

- The Arab Spring has caused Turkey to distance itself somewhat from Iran and to move closer to Saudi Arabia. This is a development that on the whole complements the international efforts to put pressure on Iran in the context of its nuclear program advances.

- The degree to which the Shiite-Sunni divide influences developments in the Arab Spring countries will affect the ability of Turkey to promote its agenda, which tries to ignore this divide.

- Turkish-Israeli relations, while not detached from Arab Spring developments, have a dynamic of their own. Solving the crisis between the two can build upon certain new joint interests. However, at the more basic level, Israel and Turkey should understand that they are both too influential to ignore one another.

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IEMed.

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Comprising 87 institutes from 33 European and Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

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