What does Turkey Promise for the Middle East and North Africa?

Türkiye Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika'ya Ne Vaat Ediyor?

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ÖZET

Türkiye tarihi tecrübesi ve imparatorluk geçmişiyle bölgede yegane bir ülkedir. Bunun ötesinde, Türkiye Asya, Balkan, Doğu, Avrupa, Akdeniz, Karadeniz, Kafkasya ve Ortadoğu gibi farklı kimlikleri bünyesinde barındırmaktadır. İslam ve demokrasiyi uyumlaştıran, farklı kimlikleri tek potada eritmeyi başaran ve farklılıkları yönetebilen tek ülke, Türkiye'dir. Öte yandan yakın tarihimizde acımasız diktatörler tarafından yönetilen ve bir türlü istikrarsızlıktan kurtulamayan Kuzey Afrika ve Ortadoğu (MENA) ülkeleri, başlangıçta Arap Baharı olarak adlandırılan ve özgürlükleri ve insan onurunu yüceltmeyi amaçlayan sosyal hareketlerle farklı bir yöne evrilmeye başladı. Bu zaman diliminde MENA ülkeleri benzer tecrübeleri daha önce yaşamış ve başarılı sonuçlara ulaşmış bir esin kaynağına ihtiyaç duymaktadırlar. Bu bakımdan özellikle Arap Baharının intikama dönüştüğü ve Akdeniz'de hâkimiyet mücadelesi ve İpek Yolu Projesi'nden kaynaklanan tansiyonun yönetilemez hale geldiği bir çağda Türkiye, İslam kültürüyle laik, demokratik, çokkültürlü ve batılı değerleri uyumlaştırabilen bir ülke olarak ilham verici ve istikbal vaadedici bir konumdadır. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma Ortadoğu üzerinden yeni bir dünya inşa edilmeye çalışıldığı günümüz dünyasında Türk tecrübesinin MENA ülkeleri için nasıl ilham kaynağı olabileceğini araştırmaya hasredilmiştir.

ABSTRACT

Turkey is a unique country with its historical experiences and imperial background in the region. Moreover, Turkey shelters different identities within its structure of multiple identities such as Asian, Balkan, Eastern, European, Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caucasian and Middle Eastern identities. Furthermore, Turkey achieved to harmonize the Islam and democracy within a melting pot. On the other hand, the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries which suffered from the dictatorships and destabilities during their recent history gained a new momentum for the sake of promoting liberties and human dignity arisen from the social movement called as Arab Spring. During this period of time, the MENA countries need a trajectory which can be drawn by an inspiring country which suffered almost the same experience before. Especially just immediate aftermath of the revenge of the Arab Spring and the emerging conflicts over the dominance of Mediterranean and Silk Road Project, Turkey can be very promising case for these countries with its harmonizing capacity Islamic culture by the secular, multicultural, democratic, and western-oriented values. In this context, this study aims to find how Turkish experience can be promising for the MENA countries in shaping process of a new world order over the Middle East.

1. INTRODUCTION

It seems that Syria is on the point of reaching a peaceful end as a result of various summits and agreements. Unfortunately, it does not mean that the Middle East will keep the perpetual order and stability and so it will be. Then we should ask why this region comes to a dead end all the time as the center of instability by suffering from the successive troubles such as wars, immigrations, and violence? And how Turkey can still left standing in spite of suffering the similar problems and sharing the same socio-political conjuncture approximately?

It will be prudent to answer these questions by comparing the characteristic peculiarities of both Turkey and the Middle East. Indubitably, the social structure, the modus vivendi of the politics, manner of life, and the geopolitical priorities are very important parameters in this comparison.

When we look the socio-political dynamics of the Middle East more closely, it will be easily seen that there is an inconsistency between the state and society, governing and governed, and elite and ordinary people in respect of their norms, values, perspectives of life as falling into instability (Berting, 2006:76). Non-institutionalization of the democracy, lack of political voice for the civil or individual initiative and the patrimonial and autocratic administrative mentality led to the discrepancy between the state and society.

The second parameter to destabilize the region is being entered and occupied territory because of its energy resources. Social dynamics cannot be constant due to the intervention into the natural changing process of the regional communities.

The third reason is that the past conflicts are kept alive and a comprehensive domestic peace is sacrificed unfortunate historical legacy. As it is known, the Middle East incorporating the peoples with various religions, languages, race and ethnic roots could not consummate their nationalization processes individually and could not provide the social cohesion undermined by the tribes apart from the social integration.

The last reason of the instability in the region is the persistent perception of the threat felt by the regional powers because the regional actors highlight their own interests by singling out individual matters instead of regional ones. Therefore, the regionalization is not implemented by taking regional initiatives in order to solve the regional problems. Otherwise almost all local conflicts are regionalized and the past disputes shape the decision making mechanism rather than the social legitimacy.

On the other hand, Turkey as a country which never exploited by the foreign powers is a unique inspiring state with his democracy experiment for two centuries, emancipatory approach which transformed the secularism being a sphere for social conflict and strengthening structure of civilian political life in the region (Budak, 2017:32-36). However since the beginning of 2011, a kind of sociopolitical movement called as "Arab Spring" was initiated for the sake of promoting the individual rights and freedoms and enhancing the democracy, economic welfare and human dignity as an unprecedented social phenomenon within the last century. Nevertheless, this social reality was urged by the social dynamics initially was reversed due to the internal actors' inadequacy in respect of political experiment and the manipulation of international community. The Middle East was once again marginalized and the sociological time has been intermitted at the end of the day.

However it seems that a geography which enjoyed the merits of democracy and experienced the defiance against the dictators and displayed a strong social solidarity for the sake of human dignity will never renounce form the idea of revolution. In this context, Turkey raised his importance as a model for this region with his democratic, secular, and equipped with the western values in respect of harmonizing Islam and democracy, sustaining his economic development by no making concessions from the democratic priorities, avoiding implementing identity politics and, in this way, Turkey was differentiated from the rest of the region.

2. GAINING OF THE SECULARISM A LIBERAL CHARACTER

What parameters make Turkey different from the rest of the Middle East in respect of internalized, mature and working democracy? First parameter is the internalization of the secularism within every stage of the daily life to prevent the identity politics categorizing the people depending upon their beliefs and sectarian choices. In the geography where the sectarian identities and cleavages become the struggle for representation and existence, it is easily understood that the task of the state is just to contribute in elucidating, transferring and sharing the commonly accepted Islamic values to the different segments of society. Consequently what we mean by the concept secularism is not referring to the French radical laicism, contrarily to the Anglo-Saxon secularism opening an extensive area of individual freedom for all beliefs without exception.

As a matter of fact, the ruling party in Turkey defines himself as "conservative-democratic" without referring to any religious attribution by placing himself a catch-all party appealing to various ideas and approaches.

3. COOPERATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The second parameter which makes Turkish democracy experiment authentic and functional is the network of exclusive relations with the international institutions and organizations. However Turkey has arrived the democracy and multi-party system by means of a choice which was shaped as a result of pressures exercised by the international community in 1947. The most concrete demonstration of this special relation is that Turkey was initiated with the membership of UN, NATO and European Council respectively and his official declaration as the candidate to the EU in December 1999 was crowned by the EU negotiation process in 2005 ultimately. The EU contributed Turkey's promoting of human rights, democracy, supremacy of law, cultural plurality and multiculturalism as a "external changing mechanism" for years. Similar with many countries of the Middle East, civil and military bureaucracy establishing the nation-state in Turkey insisted on not transferring the power for the ordinary citizens. The resistance of internal dynamics of Turkey against the transition period of democracy made the contributions of the EU inevitable as a state policy. In this context, the harmonization laws had been adopted by the Turkish parliament immediately before the negotiation process for the sake of enhancing and strengthening the intrinsic democracy and at the end of the day, civil-military balance established over the EU. Consequently, Turkey has so deep-rooted and strong democracy that it is not possible to reverse.

4. TRANSITION FROM MILITARY COUP D'ÉTAT TO THE INTRINSIC DEMOCRACY

Turkey's democracy was interrupted many times within its evolutionary period by means of anti-democratic regimes which left pressure and tutelage their behind. Nevertheless, Turkish governments carried out to provide the bloodless transition period within a short time and with very limited cost. No wonder two hundred years democracy experiment of Turkey lie behind this achievement. Moreover newly established Turkish Republic suffering from the authoritarian single party regime during 1920s had preferred to place within the pluralist, democratic NATO alliance at the initial period of bi-polar world system. Even though the first democratic elections were held in 1950 were eventuated with the victory of Democrat Party, the military interventions were followed each other three times decennially. Fortunately Turkey succeeded to deal with such a kind of interventions thanks to the democratic inclination and prudential decisions of Turkish people.

For Turkish democracy experiment we analyzed briefly, three main criteria are essential to be source of inspiration to the Middle East. First criteria is social experience inherited by past history, second one is will to be a source of inspiration and the last one is reliability and prestige. The Turkish practice to harmonize Islam and democracy and provide the economic development in accompanying with the social cohesion and offer a very liberal secularism approve that Turkey has adequate democracy experience as a stability island within his geography. Eventually Turkey seemly established the essential organizations and institutions for the sake of the development of democracy, constituted a functional mechanism and constructed a coherent communication channel and civil society to regulate strong ties between the governing and governed. In addition, Turkish experience demonstrated that the secularism means nothing alone but it gains meaning with its liberal definition and within the working democratic regime.

Under these circumstances, Turkey was never indifferent to the democratic evolution of the Middle Eastern countries. He generously shared his all experience and supported the peoples of Arab Spring who desire for democracy against the dictatorial regimes. Having imperial past and multicultural structure of society Turkey

proved that he is the bridge amidst the civilizations and a monument of tolerance among the cultures. Lastly, his rejection of March 1st memorandum against the US in 2003, 'one-minute' stake against the Israel in Davos Economic Summit of 2009, his active participation to enhance the Syrian democracy, his unique opposition against Sisi military intervention of Egypt prove the will of Turkey to support the democratic transition period in the Middle East. In addition, Operations Euphrates Shield, Idlib and Olive Branch made Turkey one of the leading figures in constituting a democratic Syria as well. Actually Turkey's involvement in the Astana talks together with Russia and Iran was a significant step for the country to play a more constructive role in shaping the future of its neighbor Syria.

5. THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE ARAB SPRING

Poverty and high levels of unemployment were enough to provoke a revolt then the Arab world have permanent uprisings over many decades. Here in order to explain the shift from the relative stability to mass unrest, it is necessary to focus on what has changed rather than what has stayed the same. For instance, high unemployment too is not a new development and has been largely structural during the decades. However, on closer inspection, it is clear that something has changed. In essence, the unemployment has typically become much better educated than in the past. For instance, in Egypt, unemployment rate broadly stable from 1984-2010. However, unemployment for educated youth increased by factor of 10 over the past two decades. What seems to be happening is that many more youth are receiving a higher education but they are often finding it hard to find jobs afterwards. In this context, it is significant that Mohammad Bouazizi, the Tunusian whose self-immolation sparked off the protests, was reportedly a university graduate. In any case, it is this high level of educated youth unemployment that probably helps explain the use of Facebook and twitter in organizing the protests. It is not that social networking tools were a cause of unrest. Social networking has in turn become a symbol of new generation.

Perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of the protests relates to their political character. Western commentators in particular are quick to see the shadow of Islamic fundamentalism behind every protest. It would be better to see the protests as the result of the crisis of legitimacy of Arab regimes. Many of the rulers have their roots in an earlier era rather than having a close connection with contemporary Arab societies. For instance, Egypt's Mubarak was essentially the last representative of the Free Officers Coup of 1952 (Milton-Edwards, 2005:87). In essence, all the traditional sources of Arab legitimacy have been eroded. Pan-Arabism had been exhausted by the 1960s, anti-Zionism by the 1990s, and most recently political Islam has lost support. In a sense then, the mood in the Arab street can be defined as post-Arabist, post-anti-Zionist and post-Islamic. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to explain the terms we mentioned in this section.

During the first phase of the independence of the Arab regimes until 1967, the borders of the Arab regimes were largely seen as artificial impositions of the West. There was a widespread popular desire for the leaders to be transcended and for the recognition of a single Arab nation. There was often a serious attempt to turn Egypt and Syrian into a unified country during this period. The aspiration of Pan-Arabism was dealt with a devastating blow with the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. In just 6 days, Israel destroyed the armies of the surrounding Arab countries including that of Egypt, the most populous Arab states and the leading driver of Pan-Arabism. A unified Arab nation no longer seemed like a realistic possibility.

Arab regimes used to be able to use anti-Israel rhetoric as a way of winning popular support from their population (Altunışık, 1999:66-69). The Arab world would generally present itself as supporting the struggle for Palestinian freedom against what it saw as the Zionist enemy and its western supporters. In any case, the tactic of winning popular legitimacy by proclaiming support for the Palestinian struggle has lost purchase because of Oslo Accord of 1993 which settles the Egypt's accommodation with Israel and western powers (Lewis, 1993:32). Actually, it is really plausible and apprehensible that the Jewish identity is other of the Arabic identity in many sociological and historical respects. However, some Arabic politicians and dictators overemphasized and exaggerated this otherness issue and hostility in order to legitimize their cruel and brutal politics and attach the citizens against the common threat.

The question of political Islam is probably the most misunderstood factor in the Middle East (Hatina, 2007:44). Many western commentators seem to see a straight line from headscarves and the Islamic regime in Iran to jihadi organization such as al-Qaeda. From this perspective, the question is how extreme they are. In reality, Islam is as varied as Christianity with its multiplicity of community in terms of those who act in its name. In many cases, there is little in common between different Islamic groups and trends. For instance, even though many of the Egyptian population are religious, they keep their faith separate from their political demands. In this

sense, the movement of Arab Spring is secular. There is a paradoxical case in Egyptian state. That is, according to the Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution: "Islam is the religion of the state" (Ahrari, 1996:54). Nevertheless, the society is not convenient with the model of theocratic state. Religion is a part of national identity. It was cultural but not political notion.

In this context, newly established Turkish Republic during 1923 and onwards, with the influence of the anti-democratic structure of the Europe which is composed of Nazis', socialist, and fascist governments was favor of the radical laicism borrowed from the France. According to this version of laicism, the state is bound to press and control the religion. The citizen should believe and pray in accordance with the principles determined by the state. Nevertheless, in line with the democratization of Europe and EU membership process of Turkey, Turkey shifted from the radical laicism into the democratic secularization process (İnaç, 2016:77-79). Actually it was transformation from the Central European law into supremacy of law principle. The first version of law depends upon the distinction of state and society before law. That is; according to Lewis, the state dictates law and the society obeys, the citizen is perceived as threat against the state, the citizen should accept the ideology indoctrinated and imposed by the state, the state is subject of public law which gives priority for the state, the individual is subject of common law which weakens him / her against the crimes committed by the state (Lewis, 1993:59). On the other hand, the principle of the supremacy of law is originated by the society and the individual and state should obey these rules created by the state equally. This approach makes the society much more harmonized and homogenized. There is no authoritarian attitude and the dictation of religion for the citizen.

6. THE COLLAPSE OF THE LEGITIMACY OF THE EXISTING REGIMES AND TURKEY

Overall, all three pillars of the legitimacy of the Arab regimes have either been discredited or are in the process of losing it. Neither Pan-Arabism, nor Anti-Zionism nor political Islam is sufficient to give them a convincing claim to political leadership. None of them are there any alternative visions on the horizon. In this framework, Turkey's experience of democracy has vitally importance for the Arab uprising. For instance, Egypt is multicultural country which consists of different religions, sects, and ethnicities. Copts constitutes the ten percent of the population.

In this context, Turkey engaged of the attempts for a new Constitution which will lead to redefine the citizenship and identity issues (Arı, 2008:114). In this experience, it is really expected to reach the equal citizenship and the definition of the identity which will be comprehensive and represent every segments of society. Ultimate target of these efforts is to create a multicultural society to promote the rights of the ethnic, religious, linguistic minorities by revising the existing system of education, governance, and political orientation. In international politics, Turkey lives the privilege of having this understanding of secularism. However, Turkey is a unique country which is secular, democratic and law state endowed with the western values even she consists of mostly Muslim citizens. This character of Turkey may make Turkey role-model for the Arabic countries which seek the more democratic and comfortable life. Nevertheless, this discussion has been occurred in Turkey within the extent of "moderate Islam" and in Middle East the people had some hesitations against the word "laicism" (Aras, 2003:16-18).

CONCLUSION

In recent decades, western influence in the Middle East has declined significantly in both economic and political terms. Although the West remains a key player, it does not have the overriding influence it once did. At the same time, the rise of developing East Asia, particularly China, is leading to a global reorientation of economies and polities (Dresch, 2005:13). And the global financial crises were prevented, limited and lessened the influence of the West over the Middle East.

Actually, America's influence has declined more in political terms than economic respects. From this perspective, the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have underlined the limits of American power (Raymond, 2003:34-36). Despite the massive use of military power, the new Iraq is far from a model of democracy and Afghanistan as the one of the world's poorest countries has not been subdued. Nor has USA succeeded in imposing a final settlement on Israel and Palestinians despite several well-publicized attempts. Actually 9/11 events in 2001 and invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003 by excuse of bringing democracy into the region provoked the discussion of "clash of civilizations" theory developed by Samuel Huntington.

Therefore not only with its political insufficiency but also her economic weakness, USA influence on the Middle East is likely to decline further. Meanwhile, America's foreign policy is shifting more towards East Asia while Europe's influence is declining overall. Therefore, western influence, while still strong, is a long way from its zenith.

The area will remain destabilized over an extended period. It is not possible to say that what will happen in the future is not clear. If the Arab regimes fail to deliver on the aspirations of their increasingly educated populations, they are likely to see increased instability. Meanwhile, the continuing decline of the West will decrease the legitimacy of existing Arab regimes (Harari, 2011:67). For instance, Syrian government pretended and disguised as willing to make some democratic concessions and if the opposition would compromise with minimal demands, opposition would be coopted by the regimes. Nevertheless, in recent months Syrian leader shed the blood of her people brutally. In those countries, only the most determined opposition is likely to succeed in bringing democratic change. Polity will get polarized and there will be long disputes over new political structures and methods of governance. Democracy chances appear slim. At the wider international level, Arab countries of the region may constitute themselves into a bloc against the western world.

As a result, all these developments led to the incompatibility between the state and society, the permanent chaos and destabilization, the competition arisen from the historical heritage, the weakness of the regional initiative, and the regionalization of the conflicts and violence in the Middle East.

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