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THE ARAB AWAKENING AND THE TURKISH UNREST

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The modern Arab Spring flowered in Tunisia in 2010 and in Egypt in 2011. The Turkish Republic was affected indirectly by the Arab Spring, and was particularly disrupted by the Syrian Civil War and the flow of Syrian refugees into Turkey from 2012 onwards.

This paper compares the original Arab awakening of 2011 with the unrest in the Turkish Republic in the second half of 2013. But we shall also explore the original impact of Mustapha Kemal Ataturk and the legacy which followed after his revolution.

We hope to demonstrate that Ataturk's Turkey was a case of a Muslim society democratized from above — whereas Tunisia and Egypt have illustrated attempted democratization from below.

The first comparison between the Arab awakening and the Turkish unrest will be directly along parallel lines. We shall then retreat into the Ataturk history of democratization from above.

The Arab Awakening	The Turkish Unrest
Contagious political uprising across Boundaries	Non-contagious political uprising within Turkey
Multiple state quest for the open society	Single state quest for the open society
A Tale of Two Continents—The Afro-Arab Spring	A Tale of a bicontinental country— Eurasian Turkey
The temporary triumph of Islamist parties: The Muslim Brotherhood and others	The triumph of Islamist party—Justice and Development Party (AKP)
The partial demilitarization of politics of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya	The partial demilitarization of politics in Turkey in the last decade
Experimenting with Re-Islamization	Experimenting with Islamization: Legitimizing the hijab, banning the sale of alcohol between 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., banning sale of alcohol around mosques and school precincts
A major role of social media for the Original Tahir Square and in Tunisia	Wider role of social media with the uprising in Taksim
Multiple social classes in the Arab awakening	The Turkish middle class predominated in the summer uprising of 2013
The Egyptian uprising was led by two Cities: Cairo and Alexandria	The Turkish uprising was led by two cities: Istanbul and Ankara
Two Libyan cities fought each other and caused the assassination of Muammar Gaddafi— Tripoli was defeated by Benghazi with Western help	The political divide of summer 2013 was between protesting rallies in Istanbul and pro-government rallies in Ankara
Declining Arab influence in Africa: Fewer Embassies	Expanding Turkish influence in Africa: 34 Embassies
The Arab League threw Muammar Gaddafi under the bus in 2012.	Alliance of Civilizations: Led by Turkey and the United Nations. Turkey vs. Syria
Fewer Arab flights to African airports	More flights to Africa by Turkish airways
Declining Arab involvement in African education	Expanding Turkish involvement in African education
Pre-Islamic Female Head of State: Hatshepsut in ancient Egypt [1479 to 1458] BCE. Also Cleopatra IV [69 BCE to 30 BCE]	Post-Islamic female Head of State: Tansu Çiller

The most spectacular example of democratizing a Muslim society from above is still the case of the Ataturk revolution of the 1920s and 1930s. On the other hand, the most spectacular twin cases of trying to democratize a Muslim society from below are, firstly, the popular uprising which overthrew President Zeinal Abedain Ben Ali in Tunisia in January 2011 and, secondly, the popular Tahrir Square revolution in Cairo which succeeded in ousting President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt by February 11, 2011.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk asked himself in the inter-war years “Can we liberally democratize without culturally Westernizing?” Mustafa Kemal regarded it as a trade-off. To all intents and purposes, Kemalism regarded cultural Westernization as a precondition for liberal democratization and secular modernization.ⁱ

One of the greatest paradoxes of the Ataturk revolution was that he brilliantly saved the political independence of Turkey, and then proceeded to sacrifice the *cultural* authenticity of his country. Kemalism had reached the conclusion that there had to be a trade-off between political autonomy and cultural authenticity.

Ataturk was not ashamed of acknowledging that liberal democracy was a Western invention. Turkey therefore had to become as Western as possible in way of life if Turkey was to be democratic in ways of politics and governance.

The most obvious step towards Kemalist democracy was first and foremost the abolition of the monarchy or sultanate, which was effected in 1922.ⁱⁱ The Sultan fled the country on board a British vessel.ⁱⁱⁱ The Turkish Republic was established a year later towards the end of October 1923.^{iv}

An opportunity was missed for creating a sovereign *Muslim Vatican* in a small territory, as the Ottoman Empire disintegrated. The Caliphate had been the nearest approximation to a Muslim Papacy. A small territory could have been created with absolute sovereignty of its own, and a new method devised for electing a new Caliph when the previous incumbent died — the equivalent of a Council of Cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church.

Unfortunately this supreme opportunity of creating a sovereign Muslim Vatican was squandered away in the 1920s. The Caliphate was abolished on March 3rd, 1924.^v

Just as Italy has been a secular state in spite of having a sovereign Vatican next to Rome, Turkey could have been a secular state even if it saved the Caliphate with its own separate jurisdiction. But it was not to be. Mustafa Kemal saved the sovereign independence of Turkey but terminated the Caliphate once and for all.

Turkey's *democratization* from above was simultaneously Turkey's *Westernization* from above. It was also Turkey's *secularization* and *liberalization*.

These three processes were undertaken step-by-step — *Westernization*, *secularization* and *democratization*.

The year after the abolition of the Caliphate was also the year when public activities of religious sects were banned.^{vi} The dress culture of Turks was compulsorily secularized.^{vii} Wearing religious attire was in 1924 restricted to sanctuaries, monasteries and Mosques.^{viii}

Steps were also taken to make secular law and jurisprudence supreme from 1926, thus marginalizing much of the Sharia in the lives of ordinary Turks, in spite of their being Muslim.^{ix}

Dress culture of ordinary folks was also directly affected in 1926 when the Turkish Fez was discouraged and the European hat promoted.^x It continued to be believed that democracy needed the soil of Westernization.

About actual individual names of Turks, Ataturk did not make the mistake of African societies. He avoided adopting Euro-Christian and Jewish names at the expense of indigenous Turkish ones.

However, Turkish nicknames were abolished — as were personal titles and Ottoman decorations like *Bey and Pasha*.^{xi} The Surname Law was also passed in 1934 in imitation of European sequence of names, rather than imitating actual European names.^{xii}

On November 24, 1934, Mustafa Kemal himself was given the surname of ATATURK – the father of the Turks.^{xiii} The new name was supposed to be a gift from the Turkish people.

The Kemalist belief persisted that liberal democracy needed the soil of the wider Western culture in order to thrive. Turkey adopted the Western calendar in 1925,^{xiv} the international metric system as early as 1931.^{xv}

The Kemalist revolution tried to dis-Arabize the Turkish language in vocabulary and alphabet as far as possible.^{xvi} But with regard to numerals the process of Europeanization was indistinguishable from Arabization. After all, the numerals which Europeans use are called “Arabic numerals”. Turkey Euro-Arabized its numerate culture in 1928.

Ataturk also invited the American “Grand Mufti” of liberal progressive education, John Dewey to help reform Turkish schools in major cities and establish linkages between education and preparation for democracy.^{xvii}

More directly relevant to democratization were Ataturk's ideas about empowering women in the political process. From 1926 the Kemalist revolution started addressing the gender question — including the newly recognized eligibility of women to run for parliamentary elections and be elected to the national legislature.^{xviii}

The belief persisted that liberal democratization required wider cultural Westernization. In 1928 the Roman alphabet for the Turkish language was introduced to replace the Arabic alphabet.^{xix}

Institutions were also established to address the national history of Turkey rather than the history of the Ottoman Empire.^{xx} An institution was also established to monitor desired changes in the Turkish language.^{xxi}

Because of the influence of the Qur'an the Arabic language has been stabilized over a period of fourteen centuries.^{xxii} On the other hand, because of the influence of the Kemalist revolution the Turkish language has changed beyond all recognition in less than a century.^{xxiii} Ottoman Turkish is almost a different language from the modern Turkish of the Republic.^{xxiv}

One big advantage of democratization from above is the fact that those who have abolished the old order are still there to create the new political order. Ataturk saved the sovereignty of the country, abolished the Sultanate, ended the Caliphate, and then introduced wide-ranging cultural changes in preparation for secularization, Westernization and democratization. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was President of Turkey from 1923 to 1938.^{xxv} He died in office after fifteen years of neo-democratic and secular changes in Turkey.^{xxvi}

On the other hand, democratization from below is more effective in ending the old order than in shaping the new one. The protesters in Tunis in January 2011 and in Tahrir Square in Cairo in February 2011 ousted two presidents who had been in power for decades. It was a dramatic achievement. But we still do not know how constructive the protesters of Tunisia and Tahrir will be in shaping the new future.

The major disadvantage of democratization from above is that even if the changes are genuinely democratic, it is often a case of guided democracy at best – and a case of imposed democracy at worst. Democratization from above begins by being elitist democracy.

In the Turkish experience a second disadvantage was appointing the Turkish army as the trustee and guardian of both Turkey's secularism and her democracy.^{xxvii} For decades the Turkish military held veto-power in both the general elections and on legislation.^{xxviii} Now the military has declined in Turkey.

For the first time in the history of the Middle East at least ten Arab countries have witnessed prodemocracy demonstrations in varying degrees of intensity.^{xxix} The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt have already resulted in ousting dictators who had been entrenched in power for decades. In Libya a third dictator was literally lynched. Other Arab countries may have to avert political collapse with pre-emptive reforms. Never in the history of the Arabs have there been so many popular uprisings which seem to be inspired neither by Islam nor by anti-imperialism but in the quest for liberal reforms.

Research Institutes in Turkey should join the scholarly effort to try and understand both the probable causes and the likely consequences of the most remarkable democratizing political contagion since the collapse of the Soviet Union and of

communism in Eastern Europe in the final decade of the twentieth century. A symposium in Istanbul “The Pro-democracy Arab Uprising of 2011” has repeatedly been followed by further research and by publications, probably in both Turkish and Arabic.

In recent years political scientists have increasingly examined the hypothesis that mature democracies do not go to war against each other.^{xxx} A future war between Germany and France, or between Britain and Italy, is now inconceivable. The question therefore arises whether successful democratization in the Middle East would reduce the propensity for warfare in this volatile region of the world in future decades.

In the 1920s and 1930s Mustafa Kemal Atatürk embarked on a long term project of democratizing a Muslim society (post-Ottoman Turkey) *from above*. What the Arab world from the year 2011 is struggling to achieve is the goal of democratizing Muslim societies *from below*. The long-term consequences may be of vital importance in relations between Israel and the Arabs, between the Muslim world and the United States, and between Islam and Western civilization.

Institutes in Istanbul are well-placed to participate in the relevant research and scholarship. This tradition has produced not only authors of relevant books and articles. It has also produced leaders in the Study of Islam and Democracy in Turkey, Presidents of Associations of Muslim Social Studies worldwide and scholars who have been to almost every Arab country and met some of their leaders.

Istanbul’s credentials are strong in the effort to promote greater understanding of this new phase in Arab history. Initiatives from Turkey are likely to be an important step forward. While Turkey is receiving Arab refugees, it may also be transmitting democratic

ideas to the Arab world. The struggle continues from Tunis to Ankara, from Cairo to Istanbul.

See Baskan, 2010, p. 145.

ii Ibid. p. 144.

iii See Brill, 1993, p. 662.

iv See Rustow, 1968, p. 826, note 29.

v See Teitelbaum, 2000, p. 423.

vi See Baskan, 2010, p. 145.

vii Ibid.

viii See Doğaner, 2009, p. 36.

ix See Baskan, 2010, p. 145.

x See Doğaner, 2009, pp. 38-39.

xi See Bayrer, 2010, p. 352.

xii See Spencer, R. F., 1961, pp. 205-207.

xiii Ibid. p. 206.

xiv See Berkes, 1964, p. vii.

xv See Gopalan et al., 2005, p. 46.

xvi See Ayata, 1996, p. 41.

xvii See Martin, 2002, p. 337.

xviii See Gopalan et al., 2005, p. 46.

xix Ibid.

xx Tahir, 2008, especially pp. 57-58.

xxi Ibid. p. 57.

xxii As cited in the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Prophet Muhammad received the revelations in Arabic (from Allah through the angel Jibrīl) that formed the Qur'an in the cave of Ḥirā from 610 to 629 CE; additionally, in 632 CE, the Prophet Muhammad died. Therefore, nearly fourteen centuries have traversed between this early period in the 7th century and the 21st century during which the Arabic language has been preserved and stabilized.

xxiii For further reading on the Kemalist Revolution language reforms see Tachau, 1964, pp. 191-204; and Baskan, 2010, p. 147.

xxiv Ibid.

xxv For further reading about the presidential tenure of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk see Rustow, 1968, 793-828.

xxvi Ibid.

xxvii For further reading on the role of the Turkish military as established during the Kemalist Revolution see Tachau & Heper, 1983, pp. 17-33; and Perlmutter, 1969, p. 392.

xxviii Ibid.

xxix These prodemocracy demonstration country sites include: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Lebanon and Jordan (others include: Iraq, Morocco and Oman). For one compilation on the 2010-2011 prodemocracy demonstrations in Arab and non-Arab majority countries see CNN special "Unrest in the Middle," February 18, 2011.

xxx See Huntington, 1996, p. 6.

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