

THE IDEOLOGICAL FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST: TURKEY MODEL

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IN THE FIELD OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, the attitudes of any states are being understood through the political ideology which fits with these attitudes or politics. Almost all of them are described as an “ism” such as capitalism, socialism, liberalism or realism. They emerged in Europe and had been exported to the rest of the world. Due to the fact that western ideological penetration on social, political and economic structure of modern Middle Eastern countries new ideologies were seen and employed as a mean of legitimizing their political actions and rule, such as liberalism, constitutionalism or nationalism. From the beginning point of modern Middle East to present, several political ideologies have been prevailing in the region; initially nationalism and then nationalist socialism, and eventually Islamism with its soft or liberal version, respectively. Yet, the impact of Islam in the region on politics has been neglected until 1970’s when petty Islamic groups have begun to blossom in almost every Middle Eastern country. That constituted a tendency among academicians, politicians, and economists interested in politics and international relations to pay attention on the influence of Islam on politics. Contrary to common knowledge, the seeds of the most of contemporary ideologies ranging from radical nationalism, socialism, Islamism (Abu Rabi, 1996), constitutionalism to democracy and their adherents have already been experienced in the last century of the Empire. What prevents scholars to realize this ideological diversification is that all of supporters of these ideologies presented as solution to the sickness of the Empire had accommodated within the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP, afterwards). Yet, only Ottomanism and then pan-Islamism during the Abdulhamid II era (Eraslan, 1992) and Turkish



nationalism in the CUP era after 1912 had become prominent political ideologies in the Empire. It is because of that they were imposed and substituted by official governments. The institution of Caliphate in Islam had been endured from the death of Prophet Muhammad until the edict was issued in March 1924, by which the institution was officially abolished by modern Turkish State government. The title of Caliph was actively used by Abdulhamid II who was former of Pan-Islamism strategy and also by the CUP government to keep the Empire together and to survive it from Western Power aggression. After the demise of the Empire, it is known that nationalist sentiments driven by military elites including intellectuals and Arab Kings or Amirs were considered to be the only way in which an independent state should adjust into in order to have their own sovereignty. That is why most of modern successor states of the Empire from Balkans to the Middle East and even to North Africa were structured based on nationalist ideologies by military rulers.

The history of the Middle Eastern States is full of trial and error methodology in terms of political ideology. The prevailing political ideologies respectively shifts from nationalism to socialism (relatively) or nationalist socialism and then eventually from socialism to Islamic sentiments from 20th century till present time (Arjomand, 1984). This Islamist oriented public opinion becomes a Middle Eastern common public opinion, at least among people. The striking point of transformation of political ideologies is that they all have been implemented by military rulers. There is almost no exception on this regard. Remarkable examples can be listed as Turkey where Atatürk and his close associates established the state and imposed a top-down secular nationalist ideology, Iraq where King Faisal formed the state and implemented nationalist discourse during mandate period, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and also Syria were all formed by military figures who collaborated with western powers and upraised against the Ottomans.

Although there was differentiation among their nationalistic intense, these military officers formed the state and tried to gain their independence from the protector western states by getting rid of mandate system (Owen, 2004). This period of political ideology started in late Ottoman Empire and endured till the Second World War, which is interesting this period did coincident with colonial years.



Abdulhamid II

The power which dethroned these rulers was also from high military rank officers, who had a tendency towards nationalist socialism during cold war. For instance, in Iraq General Qasim and in Egypt General Enver Sedat and in Syria Colonel Husni al-Za'im and then Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi did dissolve their kingdoms and established new governments composed of military rulers.¹ These political changes shifted political ideologies of the states from nationalism to socialism-centred nationalism which was backed by Soviet Unions



against western block. This political campaign lost its lean when Soviet Unions collapsed. As a result of experiencing these political ideologies, people of Middle East sought for alternative way of life against nationalism and socialism which could not find solution to their problems and bring the peace in their own society. Despite the fact that there was a remarkable shift from radical nationalism to socialism-centred nationalism from preceding period to the cold war period, in terms of rulers did not change anything as their origins were from military ranks.

In other words, in the following years after the demise of the Empire, with the forming of mandate system, Arab world was administratively divided rather than ruled by a single political unite which covers all Arabs. As a result of that, nationalist movements fought for their own state independence instead of Arab independence. In the colonial period, the nationalist sentiments together with socialism evolved and generated Pan-Arabism which simply means the political unification of all Arab states. For instance, the initiation by Egypt, Syria and Iraq to be united as a pioneering force to encompass a unique and one Arab State is a concrete evidence of pan-Arabist ideology (Halpern, 1963). The failure and disunion of this enterprise and the defeat of Egypt by Israel in 1967 war, due to that Palestine question, extinguished the flame of Arab nationalism. This was the turning point of the displacement of socialism-centred nationalist thoughts and along with losing its dominant position, the revival of Islamic movements meaning totally different way of lives and as an alternative political ideology entered into political arena and consolidated its position among society with the fostering role of Islamic revolution in Iran and Sudan.

Systematically speaking, nationalism in the Colonial period from the First to the Second World Wars, socialism-centred nationalism in the Cold War period from the Second World War to the

1980s or can be extended to the 1990s and finally firstly radical Islamism and then democracy/liberalism-centred Islamism from 1980s to present gained their prominence in the Middle Eastern states (Hunter, 1988; Choueiri, 2008). What these classifications have in common is that they all have been controlled or driven by military rulers or dictators.

As in the late Ottoman Empire in which Pan-Islamic policy was emerged and found its adherents in all over the Empire, since 1980's when Islamic sentiments² resumed to be prevailing in public opinion in the Middle Eastern countries (Lenczowski, 1970), this demand problematically and apparently has not been taken into account by military ruling elites in Arab states or by civil

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governments under military tutelage as the case of Turkey in decision making process. The major target of Islamic political groups whether radical or soft is to get power to imply Islamic rules in their own states. The methods they use to reach their target are obviously different due to the fact that their interpretations of Islamic rule related with politics are distinctive from each other. Generally speaking, despite the existence of radical Islamist groups, most of the Islamic oppositional parties and groups tend to accept democratic regimes to gain power via legitimate elections. In this regard, together with the ongoing arguments about compatibility of political Islam and democracy within the Middle Eastern countries, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Ismail, 1994), Dava Party in Iraq, National Outlook Parties and JDP in Turkey can be seen as suitable examples. These are now



several political opposition groups of parties whose policies and discourses contain Islamism. Apart from Iran, revolutionary or radical Islamism has not reached their aim which is to obtain power (Abrahamian, 1989) and this has changed the direction of Islamist groups to demand more democratic regime to take part in political arena and eventually to get the power.

The turning point where this public demand exposed itself and forced significant changes in both political ideology and practice is the electoral victory of Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) in 1996 in Turkey and Arab springs in all over the Muslim states in the Middle East and North Africa. Since the inception of nation-based states formed and ruled by military rulers having whatever political

Furthermore, globalized world forced them to come across with liberalism, democracy and human rights together capitalism in economic terms (Henry and Springborg, 2010). Instead of accommodating these changes in a way of adjustment themselves into more transparent governing, they have insisted on their absolute power whether they are military rulers or civil rulers under military tutelage. On the other hand, despite several radical Islamic movements, there has been always one Islamist movement or group demanding for democracy, liberalism and human rights for their sakes against military regimes. That is the paramount strategy Islamic movements applied to gain much more public support in their own struggle against militaristic tyranny. At the



ideology influencing all state policies, these ruling powers have always been minority and culturally, socially and economically far away from majority of their populations. It is to say that higher class of these states have been alienated themselves from their own people as they thought that they were doing best for their people without taking people's demands into account while policy making in every aspects (Gilsenan, 2000). That is the main reason these ruling elites could manage the state and their absolute power have been gradually degenerated from the last three decades.

same time, failure of both pure nationalistic and socialist ideologies turned people face towards Islamic movements which have been always among society even if they are not so religious. It is explanatory why Islamist movements gained significant among of public support in local and general elections despite repression from the military regimes.

Based on the arguments mentioned above, the reason why Turkey can be a modelling country for the Middle Eastern countries which are facing a dramatic political changes through "Arab Spring" is



that direct military regimes in Turkey in single party era accomplished to present itself as a democratic state although Ataturk and his colleagues were all from military origins and also in every coup d'états, military ruling did not endure more than three years. In addition, in spite of heavy military tutelage protected by the 1980 constitution, Turkey incepted to be a part of global economy thanks to transformation from statist market economy to open market economy. Moreover, Turkey is the first Muslim states in which an islamist political party got the power even in a coalition in 1996 and realized that direct Islamic discourse is not something military tutelage could tolerate thanks to the 1997 "soft" coup d'état. This event forced Islamist political party to be more liberal, democrat and conservative in order to have themselves acceptable by Kemalist cadre in military and its extensions in media, bureaucracy, and economy. Because of that, Justice and Development Party (JDP) came out of Welfare Party and when it got the power in 2002 election it paid delicate attention to define itself as "Conservative Democrats" and repeatedly articulated that they have changed (Özbudun, 2006). All these tactical strategies are just for avoiding from military reactions and it seems that they have been successful to eliminate the hidden power of military over the whole politics.

Why I have approached to the modelling issue from this perspective is that the same struggle between military power and civil Islamist political movements should be experienced by the rest of the Middle Eastern countries. It is because of that getting power is not enough to claim that incumbent freely elected movements have actual power over state. Almost for a century, military-centred powers with any sort of ideologies have held the power in the most Middle Eastern Muslim countries and so military understanding of ruling has embedded into capillary vessels in state apparatus. Therefore, most of the Middle Eastern

states experiencing political change should follow the footprints of politics in Turkey to eliminate mentioned military typed administration and then join to global market economy with liberal, democratic (Insel, 2003) and human right-respected understanding but at the same time and most importantly meet religious demands of people, whether they are actually culturally oriented or directly Islamic.

To sum up, the Middle Eastern Muslim counties including Turkey have internalized military regimes as legitimate and needed ruling system. With this understanding, they have tried all available political ideologies to find solutions their problems. From my point of view, the core reason why these states could find solution to their

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problem is because they searched it in wrong place. The solution was not in changing political ideology but in changing military regimes and superseded it with civil, religiously sensitive and respective and also integrated with global changes in terms economy and values. To what extend it is religiously accepted is also discussible but this is out of the subject of this paper. However, as long as JDP's internal and external achievements have taken into consideration and perceived as successful, then the way that they should follow is firstly to get rid of military regimes and their remnants in state apparatus.

NOTES:

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1. As an ally of western block during the cold war, even in Turkey, 1960 coup d'état was expected to be a socialist nationalist one by several socialist movements which were thinking of that any a top-down socialist revolution could bring the justice among the society and it should be brought to people by military as it was the case in Soviet Unions.
2. I do not claim that after the collapse of the Empire, Islam has never been a par policy making in the Middle Eastern states. However, Islamic discourse and people sensitiveness towards their religion, Islam have been used for justification of their primary ideology and policies. That is why Islam has been one of the most significant determinants of the Middle Eastern countries, yet not prevailing one. The Middle East is a place where Islam came into existence and it has been perceived as a natural part of that region and of people living there. It has penetrated into the blood of that region. In the mid-20th century, a few political groups generated by people who have desire to be ruled by Islamic rules have already existed throughout modern Middle Eastern history but they did not have a strong voice to be heard by public and politicians. The attention for such political groups reached at high level with the Islamic revolution in Iran and the impact of Islam on politics was depicted with some description such as revival of Islam, political Islam, radical Islam or Islamic resurgence, etc. due to the proliferation of such political groups (Ayubi, 1991). After 1980's and onwards, Islamism has transformed from revolutionary to conservatism or soft Islam. That led to the debate whether political Islam and democracy is compatible or not.

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