

# Iran, Turkey and the Arab Revolutions

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## **Abstract**

This writing tries to examine and analyze political and ideological stances adopted by Iran and Turkey towards the recent Arab revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa. In fact, the main question is to what extent the Arab revolutions have affected the level of cooperation and disputes between the two states. Certainly Turkey's Neo-Ottoman policy as new Turkish foreign policy discourse has deeply influenced Ankara-Tehran relations, after the Islamists came to power. That is to say that Turkey's new foreign policy and its exceptional horizons in the Justice and Development Party's Islamist strategy have posed new challenges to Iran's increasing diplomatic activities in the Middle East. From this perspective, This paper argues that Turkey's Neo-Ottoman discourse towards the recent Arab revolutions in the region has caused tensions between the two countries in the new politico-security settings of the Middle East.

**Keywords:** Neo-Ottomanism, Arab Revolutions, Turkey, Islamic Republic of Iran, Middle East, Mediation, Regional Intervention

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(Received: 1 May 2012 - Accepted: 28 September 2012)

### **Introduction**

The outbreak of the uprisings known as the Arab Spring in the Middle East led Turkey to play an active, assertive role in the uprisings; a role which has been occasionally accompanied with apparent paradoxes and interventions. An observation of Turkey's foreign policy in response to the revolutions in the Arab countries reveals Ankara has been increasingly keen on exporting its model of governance inspired by the Neo-Ottoman discourse to these countries. This discourse within the context of moderate modern Islamism has brought about numerous economic advantages for the Turks which has led to reasonable political relations with all world countries. For the Turks, securing their national interest tops their agenda, rather than enmity and conflict with other countries. The Islamist Turks not only have not severed their relations with the United States, but also they have consolidated them. Americans also view the Turks as their strategic ally. With the outbreak of these uprisings, this policy, which was pursued in theory since the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002 with a synthesis of conservatism and reformism, was materialized (Balci, 2011: 3).

The start of the wave of Arab Spring in the Middle East helped Turkey enter a new area. The oppressed Arab masses rose up against their rulers and overthrew Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi respectively in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; spreading the freedom-seeking wave to the entire Arab World. In Yemen and Syria political conflict is still coning on. Naturally with the Arab regimes collapsing, the political system of governance adopted by the Islamic



Republic of Iran can serve as an example. Being aware of this fact, Turkey makes efforts to present with countries with a secular democratic pattern, which has been implemented in his own country, as the main regional pattern, using its own pragmatist policy in cooperation with the West and the United States.

Therefore, propagating the Turkish Islam, Turkey seeks to either reject or emphasize the unfeasibility of the system proposed by the Islamic Revolution, offering its Anatolian model of Islam as the first priority of the Middle East Muslims. According to Davutoglu, the Arab World uprisings represent the Arab awakening in the Arab countries, whereas Iran interprets these developments as the Islamic awakening. Nonetheless, pursuing the Turkish Islam model is construed as in line of providing the ground for new regional order, because the Turkish scholars claim that Turkey's role in these revolutions has even been more crucial and influential than those of the European Union and the United States. The new Turkey is a product and protector of the post-Camp David order and will pursue its orientation in line of the slogan of zero problems with the neighbors (Taha Ozhan, 2011).

Generally speaking, all countries in the Middle East where these uprisings took place have always attracted the attention of Turkish foreign policy because of their historical attachment to the Ottoman era. In fact, it was with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that new countries emerged and currently the Justice and Development government thinks that it offers the only desirable pattern for the Middle Eastern and Islamic countries with their democratic-Muslim thinking (and the fact that they have managed to reach a compromise between tradition and modernity). Besides, it has to be reminded that since the Muslim Brotherhood has huge influence in most of the areas affected by the uprisings and the Justice and Development Party is theoretically and practically close to the Brotherhood thinking, Turkish politicians believe that this pattern can be applied to all uprisings; a pattern which is indeed the most important message and



activism of the country (Athary, 2011). This, in turn, has increased Iranian sensitivities as it overshadows Iran's pivotal role in these developments and throughout the Middle East strategic and security setting. Ankara's ambitious policy backed by the West and the United States for expanding the liberal Islamic pattern is to a large extent considered from the Iranian foreign policy perspective as a regional intervention, offsetting Iran's regional role, and ultimately leading to a decline in Iranian soft power and expansion of Turkey's influence in the region.

The Arab uprisings have created simultaneous opportunities for and challenges to the Iran-Turkey relations. Opportunities arise from the fact that the establishment of national-Islamic governments with independent outlooks would cause Iran and Turkey to depart from their lonely geopolitics as non-Arab states, finding new friends and political coalitions. The challenges to Iran-Turkey relations, however, center around their regional roles in managing the Arab developments particularly concerning the Syrian crisis where the two states have considerable differences. In enhancing the Western solution, Turkey seeks a regime change in Syria, whereas Iran calls for reforms in Syria in such a way that maintains a regional balance of power. In other words, Iran's main question is to strike a balance between protecting the resistance movement and Hezbollah and undertaking pacific changes in Syria. Iran opposes the Western intervention in regional Middle Eastern crises, arguing that such a practice is unacceptable and at the same time Turkey's collaboration as the facilitating factor is paradoxical (Barzegar, 2011).

This writing seeks to test the hypothesis that Turkey's Neo-Ottoman discourse towards the recent Arab revolutions has resulted in the country's behavioral paradoxes in the new Middle East political and security settings. Therefore, the Neo-Ottoman discourse in Turkish foreign policy is initially pondered and the implementation of this historical and political discourse towards the Arab revolutions is further studied. At last this article will point to the discursive



inconsistency of this practice with the Iranian foreign policy sphere in adopting a different policy particularly during the Syrian unrest.

### **I – Neo-ottomanism**

Foreign policy doctrine of the Turkish Justice and Development Party is based on a theory called ‘Strategic Depth’ advanced by current Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. As a professor of international relations at Ankara University, he has theorized Turkey’s activism in foreign policy according to the requirements of modern Turkey, avoiding simply determinist infusion of Western theories. He is one of the few academics that have found the chance to implement his views in practice. His doctrine is comprised of geopolitics, Turkish soft power, mediation and win-win game and the area of its implementation is not only the Middle East or the Balkans but as a central country in the international realm (Davutoglu, 2010: 46).

He first developed this theory in a book entitled *Strategic Depth: Turkey’s International Position*. Writing before he was appointed Turkey’s foreign minister, he assumed Turkish membership in the European Union as a general benefit for the country, arguing that since Turkey has failed to attain this overall goal after lengthy negotiations, it does not need to base its foreign policy strategy upon protracted and useless bargaining with other European countries. Of course, this doctrine is not simply based on political and security principles, so opening new markets for Turkey in the region, support for economic integration, enlargement of trade and attraction of capital constitute its other main objectives (Kirisci, 2009: 34). According to Davutoglu’s theory, Turkey’s security and stability hinge upon the more active role in achieving order, stability and security in the Middle East. Relying upon Turkey’s historical and geographical grounds in addition to the balance between democracy and security, the country can succeed in creating sphere of influence among its neighbors in the Middle East (Davutoglu, 2007: 79). On the same token, in the Turkish-Arab Cooperation Meeting held in Turkey in



June 2010, Davutoglu suggested that Turkey and the Arab World enjoyed a common geostrategic region. This region begins from Turkey and ends in Mauritania. Davutoglu emphasizes that this region even can go beyond the Istanbul straits to the Gulf of Aden. Thus this is a region for security, influence and economic integration. This new foundation from the Neo-Ottoman perspective would create a new history and space in the strategic region envisioned by Turkey (Anatolia News Agency, 2010).

The theorist of new Turkish diplomacy and architect of the country's foreign policy speaks of micro interests, believing that Turkey has to base its foreign policy upon micro interests and through which attain macro demands. As a result of this doctrine, the elite in Turkish political scene adopted a new outlook on the regional and international questions by maintaining the traditional principles of Kemalism and the Westernist attitude, which has led to significant dynamism in Turkish foreign policy. This new orientation that is the look at the East looms larger than the past in Turkish foreign policy (Ghahestani, 2011). The Justice and Development Party, with Erdogan as its key man, has sought to redefine its foreign policy based on the new doctrine. One of the theories advocated by the Party has been easing political tensions with the neighbors and mediation in resolving regional and global crises and troubles. This theory based on the Neo-Ottomanism, in fact, lies in a way along with the theory of 'leap toward the West' governing the former Turkish statesmen. Turkey's successful example, from Davutoglu's perspective, would provide a good chance for offering a new Turkish pattern among these countries especially the Muslim Middle Eastern societies (Anadolu Ajansi, 2011).

According to Neo-Ottomanism, Turkey plays a pivotal role in the Middle East and pursues strategies that maximize the country's strategic significance day by day. The main thrust of Neo-Ottomanism is that Turks increase their role and influence in areas that were used to be part of the Empire and Turkish spheres of



influence. Unlike the Ottoman Empire's policy that saw its role in territorial expansionism, this discourse is defined with seeking cooperation and dialogue within the framework of political bargaining. On this token, Turkey is the only country that can speak with both the United States and Israel (Barzegar, 2009: 2).

In order to gain further success with its new strategy, however, Turkey needs to play a more active role in the regional equations. The Middle East and its numerous challenges to the West and particularly to the United States could provide Turkey with a historical chance to play a more assertive part in the regional equations, projecting power in the international scene. To do this, Turkey would need to be active at two levels. First, it has to gain popularity among the Middle Eastern public opinions, enabling it to engage in political bargaining with the regional states. This soft diplomacy, of course, does not include political statements made by the political leaders. For instance, Turkish cinematic productions and TV series with a combination of Western and Eastern cultures were welcomed by the Arab audience and even in periods they became a serious rival to the highly popular Egyptian TV series. Turkish TV series broadcast by the Turkey's Arabic language TV network with Arabic dubbing have attracted fans among the Arab masses (Moudouros, 2010: 23). Furthermore, Erdogan's statements in the Davos World Economic Forum somewhat after the 22-day Gaza War can be seen as a turning point in Turkey's apparent foreign policy. During the session, Erdogan accused Israeli President of kidnapping and committing crimes, leaving the session in protest. After a while in response to the Israeli official insulting the Turkish ambassador, Turkish authorities publicly condemned Israel. Turkey managed to gain high popularity among the Muslim nations after the Chinese security forces clashed with the Turkic Muslims in China's Xinjiang Province, while the Arabs and Iran remained mostly silent (Saghafi, 2011).

After those events, the Turkish government provided the grounds for dispatching the Freedom Flotilla II to Gaza by



encouraging domestic grassroots groups. The group aimed to send aid to the Gaza people, but it was indeed intended to attract the attention of Middle Eastern public opinion to the benefit of Turkey. The new officials of Turkey's political scene, who thought of Neo-Ottomanism, knew well that Israel's hardline government posed numerous challenges to the United States and Europe; hence, they were not concerned about hardline Western positions. It should be, of course, mentioned that Turkish authorities' action is intended to reinforce the new Turkish idea and its engagement in the new Middle East. Erdogan's democratic language, one that is attractive to the Arab Street with an anti-Israeli orientation, was successful enough to enable him to address the Arab world and propose them a new power pattern and model of governance after the fall of Mubarak and Gaddafi in Egypt and Libya (Ozhan, 2011: 5).

## **II - Turkey and the Arab Spring**

In his book, *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, George Friedman has predicted the geopolitics of the world system till 2100 in an amusing and story-like fashion and he has a very promising forecast for Turkey. Friedman predicts that Turkey will turn into a large challenging power by 2040. What occurs currently in the Middle East (Arab Spring) will play a vital role in the realization and or destruction of these predictions.

Turkish position towards the Arab revolutions indicates a halfway policy. Turkey has dealt with the Arab World developments according to its own special considerations, while these considerations overlap with the Western interests notably United States interests. Turkey seeks to implement a new plan in the region which aims to boost its influence and leadership role in the Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa. It tries to prevent the spillover of the security dilemmas arising from developments in the neighboring countries to its own territory. Then it proposes the considerations related to economic and political leadership. For the



Turkish authorities, any tension and conflict among the southern neighbors might threaten Turkey's security as well as its economic plans. For them, to safeguard stability and tranquility in the region would require the adoption of a moderate policy as well as playing a mediatory role in regional developments. At the same time, in addition to its own considerations for gaining a special status, Turkey plays a kind of regional proxy role on behalf of the West and the United States. Friendly relations with the Islamist groups including the Muslim Brotherhood have been interpreted as a sign for Turkey's support for both democracy and Islamism (Ghanbarlou, 2011: 212).

This practice, mediation between the Islamists and the West on the one hand and collaboration with the Western intervention in Syria on the other, have further strengthened Turkey's hegemony-seeking role, increasing their chances of joining the European Union in the long run. For a more realistic analysis of Turkey's position towards the Arab Spring developments, we have to explore Turkey's foreign policy in case studies including Libya, Egypt and Syria and compare it with Iran's stances in this regard. With such an exploration, convergence and divergence between Iran and Turkey in adopting different attitudes will be revealed.

**Libyan Revolution:** Shortly after anti-regime demonstrations erupted in Libya and parts of the country were seized by the revolutionaries, Turkey objected to the idea of a western military intervention. But based on its interests and conservations, it agreed with a military intervention at last when it was demanded by the revolutionaries inside the country. Turkey's active engagement in the NATO activities in overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi's government was evident. While larger Arab powers such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt were absent, Ankara used all its foreign policy leverage to play a crucial role in Libya. Turkey was the first state to recognize the National Transitional Council of Libya and immediately afterwards Erdogan visited Libya along with other Western leaders (Khaled, 2011: 7). The other formal actions conducted by Turkey in the Arab-



Western current in the Libyan popular revolution included a \$ 300 million aid to the Transitional Council and active participation in the contact group in Abu Dhabi and Doha in 2011 for political and military support for the Transitional Council of Libya in order to overthrow Gaddafi's government. Iran, however, was not present in any of the contact groups because of the participation of Western powers (Turkey's \$ 300 million aid to the Libyan Revolution, 2011). Besides, it is noteworthy that Libya with rich resources and scant population is seen as a potential investment for Turkish oil and gas companies. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have expressed their interests in constructing ports and investment in Libya's oil reserves and even in Libyan industry. Furthermore, the Turkish companies will also invest in Libya and gain benefits. Erdogan's visit to Libya on September 16, 2011 can be seen as a case in point. Turkey has also welcomed the spread and export of its Turkish Islam pattern to all Arab countries as a result of Arab Spring (Ebrahimi, 2011: 5).

In an interview with the Turkish Anatolia News Agency, Head of the Transitional Council of Libya Mustafa Abdel Jalil said "Turkey would be an appropriate role model for Libya and Arab Spring countries." Stressing Turkey's democratic structure, he pointed to the country's pattern of governance as a successful model. Emphasizing the enhanced Turkey-Libya friendly relations, Abdel Jalil also declared coordination with Turkey in order to exert pressure on Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria (Today's Zaman, 2011).

A study of Iranian foreign policy towards the revolutionary Libya show Tehran initially opposed any military intervention in the country. Iran, however, backed the revolutionaries and the democratic movement in Libya, adopting a conservative policy. At the same time, the Arab revolts have brought about an ideological conflict. In other words, Turkey plans to export its model of liberal Islam and Iran seeks to show how its own version of Islamic governance has succeeded and can be adopted by other nations. In this respect, an Iranian official has warned about the conspiracy of Western powers in



enhancing the liberal Islam model –i.e. Turkish Western liberal Islam– for the Arab revolutionary countries. He views this Western effort in the direction of replacing Iranian Islamic revolutionary model with another model for the regional countries. Offering a new Turkish model for the regional countries is rooted in a third way (there is a third way entitled liberal Islam between secular authoritarianism and Islamic authoritarianism) or Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey’s foreign policy (Turkey beating Iran in Arab Spring’s War of Ideas, 2012).

It should be noted that the third way or Neo-Ottomanism, though stated by the Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu, is rooted in Mustafa Akyol’s thinking. Emphasizing that Islam has inspired the Arab Spring in his new book entitled *Islam without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty*, the Turkish writer and journalist says most of the Arab countries dominated by the Western-backed dictatorships long assumed that the only possible state was the one offered by their rulers. Inspired gradually by Islam and Islamic governments, they came to the belief that they could have a free government under Islamic laws. Furthermore, the popular uprisings in the Arab World showed that overcoming the dictatorships was possible. Of course, Akyol rejects the Iranian revolutionary model for the regional revolutionary countries, emphasizing the possibility of the Turkish model (Akyol, 2012: 33).

**Egypt:** Egypt and Turkey have many things in common as both states are located in the borders of two continents, possessing huge Islamic cultural and political force, and they are both significant players in the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, from Davutoglu’s perspective, these are the pivotal Islamic countries along with Iran and Pakistan. In the heyday of the January 25 revolution in Egypt, Turkey called for the reforms and then formally asked Mubarak to step down. In February 2011, Erdogan made his interventionist remarks before the Turkish parliament for the first time, asking Mubarak to step down (Noureddin, 2012). Given the Brotherhood’s special status in Egypt, will the future Egyptian



government belong to them? Indeed, upon what model of governance do the Brotherhood leaders look positively, the Iranian or the Turkish one? Considering Turkey's first rank in the regional economy and its rise as a critical party in resolving regional issues including the Iranian nuclear program, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and finally its appearance as a reformed model in the region, will they adopt new Turkey as a role model for their political system? (Akbinar, 2010)

Some suggested that U.S. President Barak Obama and his advisors seek to prescribe Indonesia as a role model for Egypt. Their argument looked more realistic as we saw that at last the military took up the interim government in Egypt in order to hold general elections. Of course, with the election of Mohammed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood, this model has been marginalized. At the same time, some suggested that Erdogan's Turkish model would be an appropriate model for future Egypt as Egyptians would move to adopt the Turkish alternative. Their argument centered around the common background of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey led by the incumbent Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as the former is inspired by the latter. The argument made by the second group of analysts seems not far from reality. With the fall of Hosni Mubarak and the advent of the January 25 revolution, one of the prominent members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood named Khalid al-Zaferani has proceeded to establish the Justice and Development Party. He has emphasized in an interview with the Associated Press that he has followed the Turkish model in creating the Justice and Development Party.

The London-based Alsharq Alawsat Newspaper discussed this subject in an article written by Mustafa Akyol. He wrote that last week when the newspapers were about to publish the last issue of their newspapers in the week, Khalid Al-Zaferani, one of the prominent members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood said something to the



Associated Press that affected all Egyptian and Arab world newspapers. He said: “The Justice and Development Party that we established along with some of our friends and brothers in the Muslim Brotherhood will pursue exactly the same agenda of the Turkey’s Justice and Development Party.” He emphasized that we not only named our party after the Turkey’s Justice and Development Party, but we would try to implement our policies as we receive inspirations from that party (Mousavi Khalkhali, 2011, Flag of Erdoganism was overthrown in Egypt and Syria).

Of course, it is not enough to say that the Egyptians have replicated their governance model entirely from the borders beyond their own ones. This will cause the Turkey-Iran relations to be based upon cooperation and competition unlike Libya. Egyptians will enjoy a degree of autonomy in their regional interaction towards Libya. Nonetheless, Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Egypt as the first foreign leader after the January 25 revolution and then Davutoglu visited Cairo after the Turkish elections in June 2011. These visits and agreements reached indicate the formation of a new coalition and strategy in the relations between the two countries concerning the regional issues particularly with regard to the Palestine question (Abdelghader, 2012: 3).

It is worth noting that the new Egypt will most likely make efforts to restore its lost power due to the revolution in the Arab League, United Nations, and Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The new Cairo will re-enter the regional and international power equations with a new portfolio. If this new portfolio is accompanied with an amended Turkish-Iranian model, it will be positive for Iran’s surrounding environment. Pressure on Israel will increase the center of gravity in Egypt-Iran-Turkey cooperation. In this regard, one of the former commanders in the Israeli Defense Forces Yoav Galant stated in an interview with Jerusalem Post that the regional political future will not be to the benefit of Israel at all (*A Report on the Egyptian Election Results*).

Therefore, Egyptians will take advantage of the Iranian model in



foreign policy sphere and the Turkish model in domestic politics. The Egyptian Salafist presidential candidate Hazem Abu Ismail has frequently praised the Iranian foreign policy. Regarding Turkey and Egypt, it should also be noted that currently Turkey has found further maneuverability due to Egyptian entanglement in its domestic developments. By Egypt relieving from the other troubles, it will not accept Turkish interventions in the region easily. New Egypt with a Muslim Brotherhood crescent will follow a hegemonic ambition in this crescent. This will be something self-evident for Iranians as Iran stresses the historical role and leadership of Egypt among the Arab countries. Forging a coalition with Egypt in regional issues and preserving the country's role in regional dynamism will play a significant effect on positive mutual relations (Avaz, 2012: 3). In a nutshell, further proximity and influence in the Islamist groups in Egypt will be a general feature of Iran-Turkey rivalry in new Egypt. Notably, a serious rivalry will grow between Iran and Turkey with Mohammed Morsi coming to office.

**Syria:** Before unrest started in Syria and Arab revolutions spread to the Middle Eastern Mediterranean country, Turkey-Syria relations were promoted to such a degree that both sides contemplated on forging a union. Moreover, the two sides signed tens of agreements within the past few years, opened their borders to each other, abolished visas for their citizens and the Turkish goods dominated the Syrian markets in such a way that nothing but Turkish goods could be found in the shopping centers in Aleppo, Damascus and Qamishli. Furthermore, the two sides sought to establish close collaborations in order to preclude the formation of a Kurdish state in the region. Syrian President Bashar Assad and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan established close family relations with each other in which they visited their capitals several times (Mousavi Khalkhali, 2011b).

However with the outbreak of recent demonstrations, their bilateral relations changed suddenly. Erdogan preferred to neglect a



brotherhood contract with Damascus. With intensification of unrest, doubt and self-control replaced friendliness and brotherhood. Syrians saw surprisingly that Turkish conduct has changed fundamentally particularly with the rise of Muslim Brotherhood in political arena in such a way that the Political Secretary of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood Mohamed Riyadh Shaghaf called on the people to demonstrate against the regime in Istanbul. One of the Syrian authorities observed in this regard: "We never expected our Turkish friends to be too ambivalent, showing such a degree of shamelessness." Iranians also did not conceal their concerns about the Turkish positions. They were shocked by the stances adopted by Turkey towards Syria after the new developments in that country, particularly because they thought that Ankara could build a barrier vis-à-vis Israeli and U.S. objectives in the region by forging an axis consisting of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Iranians became more hopeful about the enhancement of this axis as assisted by the Turks, after Turkey categorically supported Palestine, Erdogan treated harshly the Israeli President Shimon Peres in the Davos meeting, backed Palestinians in the Gaza blockade, and criticized Israel vehemently. Even Iranians proposed the Turks to establish a political-economic-security system in the region that would include Iraq, Syria and Lebanon plus Iran and Turkey. Nevertheless, they at last faced Jordanian proposal to join it which caused the idea of its formation to face a challenge due to Syrian positions against Jordan's membership (Iran-Turkey Relations in light of Syrian Developments, 2011).

With the unrest in Syria, ties between Damascus and Ankara now seem to have reached a no-return point. Turkey's full support for Assad's opposition and imposition of economic-political pressures on Syria along with Qatar and Saudi Arabia can play a pivotal role in regime change in Syria. Assuming this role, Turkey is moving from the regional balancer towards the role of moral hegemon in the Middle East. Syria constitutes a bridge for passing Turkish interest from NATO to the Arab region particularly from its southern part to



Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. In contrast, Iran looks at Syria as a window to the Arab World. In addition, from the Western borders, Syria facilitates Iran's access to the east Mediterranean and its regional influence for countering the West (Mohammed Ahmad, 2012).

Turkey hosted Syrian opposition on June 1, 2012; an opposition that has resorted to arms against its own president, Bashar Assad. Two days of residence in Turkish territory for the Syrian opposition have provided the grounds for intensified tension in Ankara-Damascus relations. Although Turks emphasized their mediatory role in this meeting, the fact is that Turkish statesmen have increasingly taken the side of Bashar Assad's opposition. Turkey believes that the Arab Spring has reached Damascus as well (Aydipour, Iranian Diplomacy, 2012). The meeting which was held in Antalya included personalities from the Syrian opposition who have left the country in past few years. They included Islamist groups and Christians who went into exile in the 1980s and 1990s due to the Syrian regime's pressure and suppression (Aydipour, Iranian Diplomacy, 2012). Turkey's welcoming of the Syrian opposition in its soil and turning Istanbul into a center for political planning of the Damascus opposition all attest to Turkey's Neo-Ottoman policy.

Iran and Turkey, nevertheless, view Syria as a strategic hub in their national security system. Seeing itself as a successful model in the combination of secularism, Islam and economy, Turkey believes that this model is executable in Syria. Iran also views crisis creation in Syria as the missing link in its full encirclement by the West on behalf of Turkey; hence it emphasizes dialogue with the opposition to the central government and performing political reforms in the country. In this relation, the Egyptian writer Khalid Abdelazim argues that Neo-Ottomanism as a new discourse in Turkish foreign policy particularly after the Arab revolutions has given rise to regional rivalries and occasionally exacerbation of Turkey's relations with countries such as Syria and Iran (Abdelzim, 2011).

This fact, however, may not be ignored that the positions taken



by Iran and Turkey towards the popular uprisings in the region and notably its spread to Syria went on a colliding course. Given its appraisal of the developments, Iran considered the Syrian developments not true democracy-seeking but a conspiracy designed from the outside in order to neutralize the resistance axis and as such it continued to support the Syrian government along with the implementation of reforms in the country. In contrast, by reversing its own declared doctrine regarding minimizing border tension with the neighbors and ignoring the agreements signed with the Syrian government, Turkey gradually distanced itself from Damascus, placing itself fully into the front opposing Bashar Assad's government (Khoshabi, 2011).

Nonetheless, the downing of a Turkish army's fighter plane over Syrian sky in July 2012 maximized the tension between Ankara and Damascus to the highest level. At the same time, the Guardian Newspaper revealed the creation of a command and coordination center in Istanbul for overseeing the process of sending arms to the Assad's opposition and the Free Syrian Army fighters. According to the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), "An unidentified flying object entered the Syrian aerial space from the west, flying at a low altitude over the territorial waters of the Mediterranean." According to the Syrian Army's spokesperson, this flying object, which later was identified as an F-4 fighter belonging to the Turkish Air Force, was shot down in a 10-Kilometer distance from the Latakia coast in the Mediterranean waters. Since the beginning of the Syrian hostilities, relations between the two neighboring countries, Syria and Turkey, became colder day by day. As the Turkish authorities condemn Assad's government for suppressing the opposition, Damascus accuses Turkey of sponsoring the armed opposition and encouraging the Syrian opposition. Turkey has also created camps in the areas bordering Syria for tens of thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing hostilities in Syria so that they could take refuge there (Turkish Army's Fighter was Downed in the Syrian Sky, Etemad Newspaper,

2012, 2426). Iran regards recent Turkish moves as the implementation of Western and U.S. policies in the region towards Syria.

Therefore, although Turkish friendship with Iran and Syria had become an important principle in Turkish foreign policy, this strategy, according to Ahmet Davutoglu's political philosophy in minimizing problems with neighbors, has been threatened because of the political crisis in Syria. Davutoglu carried a message for Assad that he had to stop the suppression, make urgent reforms and release the political prisoners or face a situation like that of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported that Assad wrote Davutoglu that Syria would incessantly fight terrorist groups, which of course is a term used by the Syrian regime to refer to the anti-regime protesters. Assad's message to the Turks would mean further proximity to Iran and increased rivalry between Iran and Turkey in the Middle East issues (Impact of Syrian Developments on the Exacerbation of Iran-Turkey Ties, 2011: Radio Free Europe). The New York Times earlier wrote an article about the CIA agents operating in southern Turkey to help the Syrian opposition. According to the report, based on statements made by some American officials and Arab intelligence agents, a number of CIA officers were engaged in covert operations in south Turkey, sending arms to Bashar Assad's opposition inside the country. It is said that weapons including automatic guns, mortar launchers, munitions and anti-tank weapons are transferred to the country via covert network of opposition forces such as the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. According to the New York Times, costs for production and dispatching of these weapons are sponsored by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. According to an American official, the CIA officers were stationed in southern Turkey to oversee the distribution of weapons and ensuring that the weapons would not be handed to any terrorist group like the al-Qaeda (Turkish Army's Fighter was Downed in the Syrian Sky, Etemad Newspaper, 2012, 2426).



## Conclusion

This writing sought to examine and analyze the politico-ideological positions taken by Iran and Turkey towards the Arab revolutions. In fact, to what extent have the Arab revolutions impacted the level of collaborations and disputes between the two countries? On this basis, the writing proved the hypothesis that recent Arab developments led to cooperation-rivalry between the two states particularly concerning the export of their models of governance to Egypt (rivalry) and support for the Islamists (cooperation). Moreover, relations between the two countries are not interpreted as consistent regarding Libya based on political differences notably concerning NATO's intervention. The Neo-Ottoman discourse in Turkey's foreign policy within the context of Turkey's third way (liberal Islam) has increasingly given rise to such differences. This very fact has caused Iran's sensitivity which itself seeks to export an Islamic-native model to the Arab revolutionary countries

Regarding the Syrian crisis, the two countries' behavioral conflicts against each other are exacerbated. The foreign policies of the two states take on divergent directions on this issue. On the one hand, before taking positions towards the Syrian developments, Turkey engaged in diplomatic efforts. First, Erdogan tried to contact the Syrian leaders, convincing them to make necessary reforms and changes in interaction with anti-government protests so that an incident like Hama and Homs would not repeat. Second, he sent his political, security and administrative representatives to Damascus including Ahmet Davutoglu to propose a reforms map to Syrians. Third, he made numerous political remarks in order to warn about the impact of what was going on in Syria upon the regional security developments. In this relation, he began a widespread campaign in the newspapers to the effect that what is going on in Libya cannot be adapted to Syria. Fourth, he granted refuge to some opposition groups, sending a message to Damascus that hosting the opposition



is only for helping the Syrian system and that he wants to control them for the proper implementation of reforms in Syria (Where is Turkey standing in Syrian developments? Iranian Diplomacy, 2012).

It is worth noting that after the United Nations and the Arab League envoy Kofi Annan proposed his plan for implementing cease-fire between the opposition and the Syrian government, Turkish Prime Minister reacted to the mortar attacks on Syrian-Turkish border areas by the Syrian army on April 14, 2011, emphasizing that they might resort to the NATO to protect their borders against the Syrian threat. The NATO spokesperson at the same time indicated that the Organization would take the remarks made by the Turkish Prime Minister and its responsibility to protect the country's borders very seriously. According to the French International Radio, Erdogan emphasized that Turkey might resort to Article 5 of the Constitution of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for protection of its borders against the Syrian threat. According to the Article 5 of NATO constitution, each member state has to consider an armed attack against one state to be an armed attack against all states and should help the country under attack. The border clashes between the two states in July 2012 indicated an interpretation of this very policy. This Turkish regional policy has been vigorously rejected by Iran since it relied on, one way or another, providing the ground for regional humanitarian intervention.

In contrast, the Iranian newspaper Resalat's editorial entitled 'Important Message in Response to Annan's Six-Point Proposal' read: Tehran was the center of important deliberations on recent Syrian developments. ... These negotiations contained six important messages for the Westerners and opponents of stability in Syria concerning Kofi Annan's six-point proposal which included: First, Bashar Assad is Iran's red line and the Islamic Republic never lets the democratically-elected Syrian President overthrown; second, any change in Syria within the framework of the reforms that have been initiated by the legal president of the country will be possible; third,



any unprincipled treatment of the Syrian issue would bring about destructive consequences in the regional and transregional space. Fourth, nobody is allowed to ignore the legitimate rights of the Syrian people; hence enough chance has to be granted to Bashar Assad to perform the reforms. Fifth, foreign intervention in the Syrian affairs and armed hostilities on part of the regional countries that have stipulated they would back the overthrow of Assad have to end immediately. Sixth, the solution to the Syrian question is the commitment of all parties involved to the rules of democracy (Important Message in Response to Annan's Six-Point Proposal, Resalat, 2012).

In a nutshell, the Syrian developments have transformed the cooperative space between Tehran and Ankara after the Arab Spring into a space of regional rivalries. Turkey's Neo-Ottomanism, given it has been tested in Libya, Egypt and Syria, has adversely affected the foreign policy sphere of the two states because Syria has largely become the political battleground and strategic depth and even national security sphere of the two states. Iran seeks solutions to end the Syrian crisis with a political orientation within the framework of Assad's reforms. In contrast, Turkey pursues a policy that involves the overthrow of Bashar Assad, regional intervention and bringing the West and NATO in within the framework of Libyaization of Syria. Geneva meeting on June 29, 2012 with Turkey's participation demonstrated profound differences between the Iranian and Turkish policies towards the Syrian crisis. The meeting which was in a way an extension of Kofi Annan's six-point plan resulted in the agreement of the world great powers on the formation of a national unity government in Syria. Labeling the so-called Syrian Friends' meetings in Istanbul, Paris and elsewhere as meetings of Syrian enemies, Iran has condemned Ankara's support for such gatherings.

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