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Turkey-Egypt: Turkish Model, Political Culture and Regional Power Struggle.

Ελληνικός Τίτλος: Τουρκία-Αίγυπτος: Τουρκικό Μοντέλο, Πολιτική Κουλτούρα και Περιφερειακός Ανταγωνισμός Ισχύος.

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Zenonas Tziarras is a PhD Candidate in Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, UK, and a Junior Research Scholar at the think tank Strategy International in the program “Peripheral and Global Governance & Relations with Turkey.” He holds a BA in Mediterranean Studies and International Relations from the University of the Aegean, Greece and an MA in International Relations and Strategic Studies from the University of Birmingham, UK; he has attended specialization courses in International Security at the University of Delhi, India as well as courses on Leadership and Conflict Resolution at Koç University in Istanbul. Among other things, he has been research assistant in programs on conflict analysis and resolution, while he has completed an internship at the Peace Research Institute of Oslo Cyprus Centre. He has presented papers at international conferences in Cyprus, Greece, the UK, Turkey and Poland and his latest work, due to be published in 2013, includes papers on Turkish foreign policy and cyber security in collective volumes in Greece and the USA, as well as a book on Cypriot foreign policy co-edited with Marios Efthymiopoulos.

Βιογραφικό Συγγραφέα:
Ο Ζήνωνας Τζιάρρας είναι Υποψήφιος Διδάκτωρ Πολιτικής και Διεθνών Σπουδών στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Warwick, στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο, και Junior Research Scholar στο Ινστιτούτο Strategy International, στο πρόγραμμα “Peripheral and Global Governance & Relations with Turkey”. Είναι κάτοχος Πτυχίου στις Μεσογειακές Σπουδές και Διεθνείς Σχέσεις από το Πανεπιστήμιο Αιγαίου, του Ηνωμένου Βασιλείου και έχει παρακολουθήσει εντατικό κύκλο σεμιναρίων εξειδίκευσης στη Διεθνή Ασφάλεια, στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Δελχί στην Ινδία καθώς και στην Ηγεσία και Επίλυση συγκρούσεων στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Birmingham, του Ηνωμένου Βασιλείου και έχει παρακολουθήσει εντατικό κύκλο σεμιναρίων εξειδίκευσης στη Διεθνή Ασφάλεια, στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Δελχί στην Ινδία καθώς και στην Ηγεσία και Επίλυση συγκρούσεων στο Πανεπιστήμιο Κος της Κωνσταντινούπολης. Έχει επίσης, μεταξύ άλλων, υπάρχει βοηθός έρευνας σε προγράμματα για ανάλυση και επίλυση συγκρούσεων, και έχει ολοκληρώσει πρακτική άσκηση και έρευνα στο Peace Research Institute of Oslo Cyprus Centre. Έχει παρουσιάσει κείμενα σε διεθνή συνέδρια σε Κύπρο, Ελλάδα, Τουρκία, ΗΒ και Πολωνία. Τελευταία του κείμενα για την τουρκική εξωτερική πολιτική και κυβερνοασφάλεια πρόκειται να δημοσιευτούν σε συλλογικούς τόμους έντος του 2013 σε Ελλάδα και ΗΠΑ, καθώς και ένα βιβλίο για την κυπριακή εξωτερική πολιτική, συνεπειμέλεια με τον Μάριο Ευθυμιόπουλο.
Abstract:
This paper argues that although, during the governance of the Muslim Brotherhood, the promotion of the Turkish model through political and economic support was welcomed in Egypt, it is not compatible with the country and cannot be emulated, while there are also different perceptions about the matter on the elite and mass political culture levels. Moreover, based on the political culture(s) of the county, it is very likely that future governments in Egypt would want to assume a greater regional role. Ultimately this means that the Turkish model would have failed as a means of soft power and hegemony, while it would bring Turkey and Egypt at odds as the latter would challenge the regional aspirations of the former.

Περίληψη:
Το κείμενο αυτό υποστηρίζει ότι παρόλο που η προώθηση του Τουρκικού Μοντέλου μέσω πολιτικής και οικονομικής στήριξης έγινε δεκτή στην Αίγυπτο, κατά τη διακυβέρνηση της Μουσουλμανικής Αδελφότητας, αυτό δεν είναι συμβατό με τη χώρα και δεν μπορεί να εξομοιωθεί, ενώ για το συγκεκριμένο ζήτημα υπάρχουν διαφορετικές αντιλήψεις στα επίπεδα της πολιτικής κουλτούρας των μαζών και των ελίτ. Περαιτέρω, δεδομένης της πολιτικής κουλτούρας της χώρας, είναι πολύ πιθανόν μελλοντικές κυβερνήσεις της Αιγύπτου να θέλουν να διεκδικήσουν ισχυρότερο περιφερειακό ρόλο. Αυτό σημαίνει ότι το Τουρκικό Μοντέλο θα είχε αποτύχει σαν μέσο εξάσκησης «μαλακής ισχύος» και ηγεμονίας, ενώ θα έφερε την Τουρκία αντιμέτωπη με την Αίγυπτο καθώς η τελευταία θα αποτελούσε πρόκληση για τις περιφερειακές φιλοδοξίες της πρώτης.
Turkey-Egypt: Turkish Model, Political Culture and Regional Power Struggle

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Introduction

Although the discussion about the model of the Turkish political system is not new, the ‘Arab Spring’ and the democratic deficit in the region increased its importance. The reforms, the gradual improvements in democratic principles, as well as the European accession process and potential of the Turkish state, became a subject of discussion and desire from the peoples of neighbouring countries. In the Arab world in particular, people saw Turkey as a state in an obviously better economic situation than their own; a state that preserved its cultural and religious values while at the same time provided and ensured liberties unknown to them (Fuller 2010, pp. 69-71). However, it has been also argued that Turkey saw the ‘Arab Spring’ as an opportunity for promoting itself as the ideal politico-economic model for the Arab/Muslim states in order to expand its hegemony and increase its power.

Against this background, this paper seeks to briefly identify the features of the Turkish model, look at its current strengths and weaknesses, and examine its implementation and implications in light of the ‘Arab Spring.’ In accomplishing the latter we have chosen the case study of post-‘Arab Spring’ Egypt. Egypt’s domestic dynamics are analysed from the perspective of political culture so as to identify the degree in which the promotion of the Turkish model has been received positively, and its role in the accomplishment of Turkey’s goals and the development of Turkish-Egyptian relations. The argument is that although, during the governance of the Muslim Brotherhood, the promotion of the Turkish model through political and economic support was welcomed in Egypt, it is not compatible with the country and cannot be emulated, while there were different perceptions about the matter on the elite and mass political culture levels. The overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood by the military in the summer of 2013 and the establishment of an interim government
reaffirmed some of these perceptions and also showed that the social processes of politicization and democratization underway in Egypt gradually force the governments to respond to their demands. Thus, based on the political culture(s) of the county, it is very likely that future governments would want to assume a greater regional role. Ultimately this means that the Turkish model would have failed as a means of soft power and hegemony, while it would bring Turkey and Egypt at odds as the latter would challenge the regional aspirations of the former.

**The Turkish Model and the ‘Arab Spring’**

The idea of a Turkish model dates back to the early years of the Turkish Republic but it became more important in the late 20th century, and particularly the 1990s. It was after political Islam had already entered political life and mingled with the secular – up to that point – politics of the Kemalist military-bureaucratic establishment. As such, after the end of the Cold War Turkey’s political and economic system seemed appropriate as a development model for former Soviet states of Caucasus and Central Asia with which Turkey shared cultural bonds. Mango (1993, pp. 726) summarizes the notion of a Turkish model as ‘a model of a secular, democratic, Muslim country, aiming to achieve Western standards, in partnership with the West, by applying liberal free-market policies.’ He then goes on to argue that before Turkey becomes a model, it first needs to reach the living standard of Western states and address the issue of human rights and cultural/ethnic diversity within Turkey (Mango 1993, pp. 727). To what extent has Turkey achieved those goals over the past couple of decades?

It is generally accepted that Turkish democracy has come a long way since the end of the Cold War, and especially in the 2000s. Commentators today acknowledge Turkey’s significant reform efforts in domains such as human rights, cultural and minority rights, the judiciary, and civil-military relations (Hale and Özbudun 2010, pp. 55-98). The primary driver of these positive steps has been Turkey’s accession process to the European Union (EU) and therefore its need to meet the EU’s criteria and standards. Importantly enough, most reforms were undertaken between 1999 and 2005 and were thus one of the reasons why the EU decided to start accession negotiations with Turkey from 2005, following a 2004
decision (Mamadov and Makarov 2012, pp. 44; Bnnaz Toprak 2005, pp. 183). At the same time, Turkey is said to be an example of a strong economy, as well as an example of the compatibility between democracy and Islam and/or of the modernization of Islam through the process of democratization (Göksel 2012, pp. 104; Khattab 2013, pp. 34-35).

In spite of Turkey’s exemplar – as one could argue – record, many critics point to a number of factors that prevent it from being a model of democracy for other states of the region. For example, the compatibility between Islam and democracy has been questioned. In this context Korutük (2012, pp. 67) argues that ‘any religion-based regime, Islamic or other, will have difficulty adapting itself to democracy’ while Gürsel (2011, pp. 94) maintains that ‘None of the monotheist religions, including Islam and Christianity, are compatible with democracy. Religions cannot exist without dogmas and dogmas cannot be democratic.’ However, Gürsel (2011, pp. 94) uses this line of reasoning to argue that because Turkey has been branded as ‘Muslim democracy,’ its democratic shortcomings are attributed to Islam and that is ‘unfair to religion itself.’ From that perspective Turkey cannot be a model unless it focuses on its democratic identity rather than its religious one (Gürsel 2011, pp. 97).

It has also been argued that Turkey has a long history of secularism, democratic consolidation, and participation in Western institutions; features that the countries of the ‘Arab Spring’ lack and render the Turkish model incompatible with their historical experience (Korutürk 2012, pp. 68). Furthermore, critics of the Turkish model often highlight the fact that although Turkey has made improvements by trying to address human rights issues and freedom of expression, ‘these positive developments have increasingly offset by the growing tide of attacks on free speech’ (Mamadov and Makarov 2012, pp. 44). Particular emphasis is given on the prosecution of journalists and the failure of the state to prevent it by not amending a series of laws regarding freedom of expression. Notably, according to Thomas Hammarberg’s (2011) report on ‘freedom of expression and media freedom in Turkey,’ as of 19 April 2011, 67 press workers were in prison, while the Committee to Protect Journalists (2012, p. 6) reported 76 imprisoned journalists as of 1 August, 2012; ‘At least 61 of these journalists were being held in direct relation to their published work or newsgathering activities.’ Yet the democratic deficit of Turkey is also
evident in the administration of justice, human rights (Human Rights Watch 2012, pp. 503-09; Thomas Hammarberg 2012) and, according to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (2012, pp. 216, 199-227), in the ‘systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.’ In this light, many analysts, such as Cornell (2012, pp. 24), maintain that the AKP’s ‘authoritarian tendencies have become increasingly acknowledged, [and therefore] its credibility as a force of true democratization in the Middle East has suffered concomitantly.’

With all its problems and shortcomings, it seems that Turkey and the model of its political system are still appealing to the Arab world. Moreover the preference of the Arab states and peoples for Turkey as a model has been apparent since 2009 in a survey that was conducted in seven Arab countries by the Turkish think tank Tesev (Akgün, Perçinoğlu, and Gündoğar 2009, pp. 18-22). As the survey showed, 63 per cent of the asked people said that they considered the Turkish political system as a successful case of the synthesis between Islam and democracy and, therefore, according to 61 per cent of the responders, Turkey has to be a model for the Arab world. Lastly, 77 per cent agreed that Turkey should play a bigger role in the region. In the follow-up 2010 survey the percentage of people considering Turkey as a model increased from 61 per cent to 66 per cent, while Turkey’s Muslim background, its economy, its democratic system and its support of the Palestinians and Muslims were the four most popular answers to the question ‘why can Turkey be a model?’ (Akgün et al 2011, pp. 12-13). In the 2011 survey, 67 per cent of the responders supported that Turkey presented a successful combination of Islam and democracy; at the same time the positive perception about Turkey’s model dropped from 67 per cent to 61 per cent and Turkey’s secular political system was included in the top reasons why Turkey can be a model (Akgün and Gündoğar 2012a, pp. 20-21). In the most recent survey of 2012, the favourable opinion about Turkey did indeed drop from 78 per cent in 2011 to 69 per cent; the perception of Turkey as a model also dropped significantly from 61 per cent in 2011 to 53 per cent, and Turkey’s economy together with its democracy remained on the top reasons why Turkey could be a model, while its secular political system became more important than its Muslim background. Lastly, it is important to note that the 2012 survey shows there has been a
decrease in the favourable opinion of Turkey in almost every country of the region. Yet, the less decrease has been witnessed in Egypt (from 86 per cent to 84 per cent) which now holds the second highest percentage after Libya (from 93 per cent to 90 per cent) (Akgün and Gündoğar 2012b, pp. 17, 20).

Although the reasons behind the gradual change in Turkey’s regional image are beyond the scope of this paper, they could be understood within the framework of Turkey’s deteriorated relations with Syria, Iraq, and Iran, unresolved political and legal issues within the country, as well as the negative experience of the ‘Arab Spring’ countries regarding the post-revolution pro-Islamic governments. However, despite the aforementioned problems of Turkey’s model and its worsened image, the percentage of people in the region that maintains a positive perception of Turkey and sees it as a model and an influential regional actor remains significant.

As far as the West is concerned, and the United States in particular, they would prefer to replace the authoritarian regimes of the region with political systems similar to the Turkish model of democracy, in spite of the crisis that shadowed the American-Turkish relations after the 2003 Iraq war due to conflicting views and interests over Iraq and by extension the Kurdish issue (Triantaphyllou and Fotiou 2010, pp. 168-69). This was made clear as early as 2002 in an important speech of the then US Deputy Secretary of Defence, Paul Wolfowitz, where he remarked that ‘In the United States, we understand that Turkey remains on the frontlines of the war on terror. And we also understand that Turkey is a model for those in the Muslim world who have aspirations for democratic progress and prosperity’ (Wolfowitz 2002). In this context the promotion of the Turkish model would mean, for the US and beyond, a decline in regional instability, the increase of security, the reduction of terrorism, the weakening of Iran’s regional power, and perhaps increased economic and energy benefits. Even though there are still many obstacles in American-Turkish relations, such as the issue of Iran, Israel, and the Armenian genocide, after the first election of Obama to the US presidency (2009) the relationship of the two countries improved gradually, especially in the midst of the Syrian crisis, while the US seems to keep emphasizing the importance of Turkey’s regional role as well as the promotion of the
Turkish model as a pillar of its interests in the region (Park 2008/09, pp. 17-24; Alessandri 2011, pp. 47-48).

Turkey, by capitalizing on the dynamic that it acquired from Western support and regional perceptions of its model, it behaves as the proponent of the rebels and the supporter of democracy, especially since it failed to maintain the regional status quo in the midst of the ‘Arab Spring.’ In the words of Kardaş (2011, p. 2), ‘Turkey moved to claim ownership of the democratic wave and tried to lead the regional transformation.’ It is noteworthy that after the end of the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, Turkey granted – among other things – financial help to these countries in the form of loans: $250m to Libya, $1bn to Egypt, and $500m to Tunisia – one hundred of which were given in the form of donation (Anadolu Agency 2012; Reuters 2012; Today’s Zaman 2012). By doing so Turkey hopes to maintain its close relations with the new ‘pro-Islamic’ governments that emerged in the ‘Arab Spring’ countries after the revolts, thus participating in and influencing possible political changes while renewing the already developed good neighbourly relations that offer high economic benefits as well as regional stability. In a similar spirit it has also been argued that it tries to create a ‘Sunni belt in the larger Middle East region and hopes for its leadership’ as it has been supporting the advocates of ‘moderate Islam’ and political parties related to the Muslim Brotherhood (Korutürk 2012, p. 68).

Turkey’s Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, himself writes that ‘Turkey’s reintegration with its neighbors will be yet another asset for its foreign policy,’ and he goes on adding that ‘One strength of our foreign policy…is the ongoing process of reconnecting with the people in our region with whom we shared a common history and are poised to have a common destiny.’ Moreover, the Foreign Minister argues that, ‘The values demanded by the young Arab generation is the same as what our [Turkey’s] people enjoy and we believed that they had a right to claim them’ (Davutoğlu 2012, pp. 4, 8). Thus, it is obvious that the ‘Arab Spring’ and the new order in the Middle East has become a priority for Turkish foreign policy. And even though it has been argued that Turkey has adopted a more moderate rhetoric with regard to the promotion of its model (Robins 2013, pp. 391), Ahmet Davutoğlu, while talking about the efforts to solve the Kurdish issue, said that Turkey ‘will
be a light of hope for Syrians, Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, and Yemenis who take Turkey as a model and who ask for the same in their countries’ (Küçükkoşum 2013).

After the Arab revolts in North Africa, the newly emerged governments in the countries of the ‘Arab Spring’ tried, with Turkey’s help, to find ways of learning from the Turkish model. Ülgen (2011, pp. 16-27) argued that ‘Turkey’s experience can be brought to bear on a number of significant policy areas’ such as political party reform, security sector reform, economic policies and regional integration, financial reform, housing policy reform, private sector development, and regulatory capacity building. In late 2011 Kardaş (2011, pp. 3-4) wrote that ‘Turkish leaders, officials, academics, or representatives from NGOs or think-tanks have been frequently touring those countries’ while ‘Almost no week goes by without a conference or workshop on the subject [of sharing and learning the Turkish, or AK Party, experience], either in Istanbul, Ankara, Cairo, or Tunis.’ Therefore, apart from significant financial help, Turkey has provided consultation on all sectors of social, political and economic life, which was informed by its own democratization and modernization experience. In this light, the discussion about the Turkish model focuses on its implementation and operationalization rather than on its compatibility with the Arab countries. That is because it appears that Turkey sees the promotion of its democratic model as a hegemonic tactic that would maximize its benefits, while indigenous political powers or social factions in the recipient country, that respond positively to this policy, are seen as a favourable means for its implementation.

Admittedly Turkey’s model has been questioned more and more recently, not the least because of the state’s violent crackdown on the ‘Gezi Park’ protests, in the summer of 2013, and the problems in democratic consolidation that have been revealed during that process (The Economist 2013; Berman 2013). Despite that, Turkish foreign policy continues trying to appeal to the common historical and cultural affinity that the country shares with the peoples of its Muslim neighbourhood by supporting the now overthrown Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and by accusing Israel of being behind the coup (Frazer 2013). In this context, Turkey’s foreign policy goals and efforts are important and, in the case of Turkish-Egyptian relations, they need to be juxtaposed with Egypt’s regional stature, political culture,
as well as the way the Turkish model is received in the country, to identify their significance for Turkish-Egyptian relations.

### On Turkish Hegemony and Egypt

Egypt’s domestic political and social status does play a role in the current and future Turkish-Egyptian relations. As we have already seen, Turkey and its model have been widely favoured within Egypt, at least up until the mid-2013, although there are indications that other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, are more desired by Egyptians as models (Younis 2012, pp. 109). However, the same cannot be said for the whole of the Egyptian elite. In September, 2011, during the visit of Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in Cairo, in an interview with an Egyptian TV channel he addressed the people of Egypt by saying ‘Do not be wary of secularism. I hope there will be a secular state in Egypt’ (Al Arabiya 2011). Despite the ‘rock star’ welcoming that Erdoğan received by Egyptian citizens when he arrived in Cairo (Abouzeid 2011), this statement of his did not please the Muslim Brotherhood or the press, at all. The Brotherhood’s spokesman specifically said that Erdoğan’s statements were considered as interference in Egypt’s affairs, while – referring to Turkey – he noted ‘that the experiments of other countries should not be cloned’ (Al Arabiya 2011). The stance of Egypt’s elites towards Turkey has been even more confusing as a year later Egypt agreed on signing a $1bn loan from Turkey with the Egyptian President, Mohammed Morsi, praising the ties of the two countries and Ankara’s support to Egypt. At the same time, officials from Morsi’s party said that they do not look Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) as model, although ‘analysts say Egypt's new Islamist rulers are taking notes from Turkish party's success’ (Reuters 2012).

It is true that Egypt’s elites, as well as other Arab elites, see the Turkish model with suspicion. Distrust stems from the domestic problems that Turkey itself faces, from fears that the Turkish model might be serving Turkish interests, as well as from a prevalent notion among Egyptians that Egypt has a model of its own and does not need to emulate Turkey. The skepticism about the Turkish model could be seen in Ergin’s (2013) words:
“For one second, let us conceive of a scenario in which the Turkish model was adapted to British politics. Consider a model where all deputies of the Labour Party and the Conservative Party would be handpicked by the leaders of these parties without by-election. Would it have been received as a democratic model? No way. But what would be inconceivable for British democracy, indeed and for most of other European democracies, is indeed the reality in Turkey.”

Although coming from a Turk, Ergin’s words reflect the skepticism of many Egyptian officials as well. As far as the perception that Turkey is using its model as an ‘agenda item,’ the reaction to Erdoğan’s statements during his visit in Cairo made clear that many Egyptians believe Turkey is indirectly ‘attempting to dictate to Egyptians what they should do in their own country’ (Younis 2012, pp. 110-11). On the other hand, a dominant belief among Egyptian elites, and the public alike, is that ‘Historically, Egypt had always offered a model of its own, which testifies the birth of the modern Egyptian state in 1922’ (Said quoted in Bengio 2012, pp. 60). Moreover, just like the Turks, the Egyptian public has ‘a deep sense of pride in their past leadership[,] a sense of having a natural lace in the region, as a leader, is at the helm within both societies’ (Younis 2012, pp. 108-9). But, what might that mean for Turkey’s efforts and Turkish-Egyptian relations?

The notion of Turkish regional power and hegemony is not new in the discourse about Turkish foreign policy. For example, Mufti cites former Turkish President Celal Bayar talking in 1957 of Turkey’s efforts to become ‘a little America.’ Subsequent Turkish leaderships, including the AKP, shared this idea which ‘encapsulates an aspiration for national greatness characterized by economic entrepreneurship and prosperity, dynamic political and social pluralism, and an assertive foreign policy’ (Mufti 2011, p. 1). As mentioned earlier, during the 2000s and until the outbreak of the ‘Arab Spring’ it was clear that Turkey, under the AKP, had been successful on many levels: among other things it accomplished high rates of economic development, it furthered its democratic consolidation, it increased its cultural and political influence in its neighbourhood, and it played an important role in the promotion of regional cooperation and the mediation of regional conflicts. However, according to Mufti (Ibid., p. 4), ‘As Turkey settles into its regional
hegemony and begins to establish its influence, therefore, it will inevitably come into tension with other actors who have similar ambitions in the same arenas: actors such as Russia, Iran, and Israel.’

Although Mufti only suggested a few examples of possible future hegemony rivals of Turkey, Egypt is not mentioned. This is at least to a certain extent justified as Egypt was and is in no position of pursuing regional hegemony due to domestic social, political, and economic instability. Moreover, the expanded bilateral relations of the two countries, both before and after the regime change in Egypt (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Republic of Turkey 2013), during the governance of the Muslim Brotherhood, were not indicators of an upcoming hegemonic rivalry between them. Yet, the political culture and history of the country suggest otherwise: ‘As the preeminent civilization centre of the region, and the most cohesive and weighty Arab state positioned astride the eastern and western wings of the Arab-Islamic world, Egypt naturally seeks regional leadership’ (Hinnebusch 2002, pp. 91). Admittedly, ‘leadership’ and ‘hegemony’ are not necessarily synonymous. Specifically, Clark (2011, pp. 14-16) speaks of ‘primacy’ and ‘hegemony’: primacy is mostly related to material capabilities while hegemony is followed by a ‘sense of legitimacy’ and could be even affiliated with ‘soft power.’ In this context, a state may hold the primacy in relative material power but still not be a hegemonic power. To lead is to have followers; a state with strong material power might be able to impose its will or coerce another actor to a certain end, but that is not how leadership works.

Provided that the concept of hegemony entails that the ‘dominated…embrace and internalize, the norms and values of the prevailing order,’ a hegemony, as opposed to a merely powerful state, is much more likely to lead (Mufti 2011, p. 4). As such, Egypt’s leadership of most of the Arab countries was possible in the past because of common cultural characteristics and political problems (i.e. Israel, Palestinian cause). From that perspective, the re-emergence of political Islam in the region after the ‘Arab Spring’ could potentially provide the necessary cultural and political conditions for Egypt to reclaim its role in the Arab world. That could happen either if a political Islamic power solidifies its power in Egypt or if a military-led government undergoes an ideological transformation in
order to appeal to larger masses and remain in power. Turkey, for its part, ‘has been unable to realistically gauge its true level of influence’ (Cornell 2012, pp. 23) and this has serious implications as ‘aspiration alone…is not enough, and it is easy for the hard-headed realist to scoff at the empty pretensions of those states whose ambitions run ahead of their material [and hegemonic] capabilities’ (Hurrell 2006, pp. 2).

Political Culture in Egypt and the ‘Hijacked Revolution’

A good way of looking at how the Turkish model is perceived in Egypt, the extent to which it is or could be accepted, and its role in Turkish-Egyptian relations, is by examining the Egyptian political culture. Political culture has been defined as the ‘political codes, rules, recipes, and assumptions which impose a rough order on conceptions of the political environment’ (Johnston 1995, pp. 45; see also, Dittmer 1977, pp. 553-54; and, Rosenbaum 1975, p. 4). Also, it has been argued that political culture could be defined either based on the individual level or the ‘system level’ (Rosenbaum 1975, p. 4); that is, whereas the individual level ‘entails all the important ways in which a person is subjectively oriented toward the essential elements in his political system’ (Pye and Verba paraphrased in Rosenbaum 1975, p. 4), the system level explores ‘how large masses of citizens evaluate their political institutions and officials’ (Ibid.).

While studying political culture it is important to keep in mind the distinction between the masses and elites. Although elites and masses are parts of the same society, ‘the ideas of elites are distinct from, thought they overlap with, the national political culture’ (Hague and Harrop 2001, p. 86). Thus elite political culture is defined as ‘the beliefs, attitudes and ideas about politics held by those who are closest to the centres of political power. The values of elites are more coherent and consequential than are those of the population at large’ (Ibid.). Political elites and their political culture may both reflect or shape a nation’s orientation or notions (Rosenbaum 1975, pp. 26-7). From that perspective, and given the above mentioned, it could be said that elite political culture is both informed by and distinct from the political culture of the masses; this in turn means that political culture could both constrain the behaviour of the elites and be instrumentalized by them.
The different degrees of interaction between elite and mass political culture in different political systems should be emphasized as they determine the extent to which the elites reflect the political culture of the masses, or the extent to which the elites have imposed a certain political culture upon the masses. Therefore, in non-democratic or semi-democratic states, where a large gulf is ‘separating the political elite and masses,’ there is a ‘discontinuity in political orientations...[and also] a deep, pervasive difference in the most fundamental cultural attitudes, values, and styles’ (Ibid., p. 144). On the other hand, in democratic states with fully functioning institutions and laws, the political elites and therefore at least part of their political culture reflects the majority of the masses.

Contemporary Egyptian political culture has been very much defined by the fact that Egypt has been ‘a nominally secular state both repressing and engendering Islamicist resistance. Islamic authoritarianism begat secular authoritarianism which in turn has sustained an equally authoritarian Islamic resistance’ (Mondal 2003, p. 240). The country’s long Islamic history and its ethnic homogeneity played an important part in this as well. As such, and because of its non- or, at least, semi-democratic system, the will of the masses has often been vastly different from that of the elites, especially after Sadat adopted a pro-Western stance and abandoned pan-Arab nationalism in the 1970s. Notably, the Muslim Brotherhood which expressed a large part of the society was banned from political life, while the politics of the small opposition parties was constrained by the nature of the political system itself. However both of these political streams voiced their opposition in matters such as Sadat’s pro-Western orientation, Egypt’s dependency on the US, its Israel policy, and the deteriorated relations with the Arab world.

Although Egypt’s elite followed a more balanced foreign policy after Mubarak came to power in 1981, his non-adventurist orientation and distance from armed conflicts led to ‘a retreat from Egypt’s [traditional] regional leadership role’ (Dessouki 2008, pp. 168-69, 177). This role was also associated with a unique Egyptian Arab-Islamic identity which was also a construct of Nasser’s top-down propagation. Yet under Sadat, the Egyptian mass political culture was once again manipulated into seeing other Arab countries as ‘ungrateful’ of Egypt’s contributions to the Arab cause, and thus Pan-Arab sentiments faded out.
significantly. Lastly, Mubarak’s clash with Islamic opposition was soon abandoned, as he realised that it was against the country’s cultural roots, and he adopted a more Nasserist stance – albeit superficially (Hinnebusch 2002, pp. 94).

Essentially, the secular but largely non-democratic state of Egypt was for a long time excluding any political expression of the societal Arab-Islamic dynamics. The Egyptian elections of 2012 and the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood was an indication of what people considered as an alternative to authoritarianism and the relationship between religion and politics. This is of course not to say that the revolt in Egypt was theocratic or that all Egyptians prefer political Islam over democratic secularism; after all, the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood was marginal while later its governance faced much opposition before it was eventually overthrown. Amin (2012, pp. 37) insightfully argued that the election of the Muslim Brotherhood was a result of a deliberate historical de-politicization of the Egyptian state that legitimised the existence of political Islam and its imposition on the society, thus rendering it the dominant political alternative. Egypt now seems to be in a state of violent re-politicization thus reversing that historical process. Moreover, as Kyriakidis (2012, pp. 53) correctly argues, ‘Political Islam has comparative advantages over all other parties. From Islamic parties-controlled Non-Governmental Organizations to private hospitals, social welfare in Arab countries has been left to a large extent in its [political Islam] hands.’ Leaving these historical reasons aside, the rise of the Muslim Brothers to power ultimately showed that a big part of contemporary Egypt’s mass political culture is influenced by religion as the Brotherhood has had a long history as an Islamic movement in Egypt, despite having gone through ideological transformations.

The election of the Muslim Brotherhood to power was marked by significant developments and policy shifts both domestically and in Egypt’s foreign policy. Domestically, actions such as politicized prosecutions, control over the media and the judiciary, assaults on free speech, and the promotion of undemocratic constitutional amendments, led the country into new cycles of social turbulence and disappointed not only the secular opposition and the military but also moderate Muslims who believed in the Brotherhood; it did though please some Shariah-law proponents (Trager 2013). In foreign
policy the evidence pointed to a clear yet subtle shift from the previous government’s approach. Among other things, the Muslim Brotherhood had adopted a different stance towards Israel which put in danger their bilateral 1979 peace treaty. Specifically Egypt under the Brotherhood started militarizing the Sinai Peninsula and ‘repeatedly called for changes in the treaty’s limits on troops in Sinai, seen as humiliating’ (Hendawi and Teibel 2012). In addition, as far as the Israeli-Egyptian relations are concerned, Egypt’s then President, Mohammed Morsi, strongly condemned Israel’s ‘aggression’ over Gaza during the 2012 Israel-Palestinian war, while in a 2013 interview to Al Jazeera he remarked that improvement in the relations of the two countries should not be expected as long as Palestinians were denied their rights (The Guardian 2012; Ynetnews.com 2013).

Under Morsi, Egypt tried to normalize relations with Iran by initiating the first commercial flights from Cairo to Tehran after the Iranian theocratic revolution of 1979, only to halt them later due to Sunni Islamist protests that accused Iran ‘of trying to spread the Shiite faith to Sunni countries’ (Reuters 2013). Importantly enough, Iran’s President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, visited Egypt, in the first official Iranian visit to Cairo in decades, to discuss the Syrian crisis with Morsi, notably, after the latter had already visited Tehran and told the Iranians that they should not be supporting Bashar al-Assad’s regime (Michael 2013). In general, Egypt, under Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, had become more assertive and pro-active in its foreign policy.

Morsi’s stance could be explained within the framework both of the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology and the Egyptian political culture. On the one hand insulting remarks by Morsi about the Jews as well as criticism of American policies in the Middle East made clear Egypt’s shift towards open anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism (Greenwood 2012). On the other hand, well before the ‘Arab Spring’ and its election to power, the Muslim Brotherhood made its ideas clear by publishing xenophobic remarks about Jews and Christians on its website (Fisher 2013). Further, it is worth mentioning that, beyond its own ideology, the Muslim Brotherhood was informed by and expressed a great part of the mass political culture at least in its foreign relations.
This becomes evident in the 2011 ‘Arab Attitudes’ report of The American Institute Foundation, which shows that Egypt has the lowest percentage of favourable attitudes towards the United States, among Arab countries, while 95 per cent of Egyptians disagree that the United States contributes to peace and stability in the Arab world (Zogby 2011, pp. 3-4). In 2012, a survey by the Pew Research Centre showed that 79 per cent of Egyptians have unfavourable attitudes towards the United States, while a total of 61 per cent wants the overturning of the 1979 peace treaty with Israel (Global Attitudes Project 2012a, pp. 20-3). Lastly, another 2012 survey by the Pew Research Centre showed that 60 per cent of Egyptians believe that laws should strictly follow the Quran, while 61 per cent finds the large role Islam plays in politics positive (Global Attitudes Project 2012b, pp. 2, 18). The survey findings as well as the Muslim Brotherhood’s policies show that on the one hand the elite political culture is indeed informed by a large part of the mass political culture while on the other hand the rapid authoritarianization that Egypt underwent brought the Brotherhood elites at odds with another large part of the society. To be sure, this reality does not in essence differentiate the governance of the Muslim Brotherhood from the previous regime of Hosni Mubarak; rather, it gave authoritarianism a different face and shuffled the social dynamics. Yet, this shuffling of the social dynamics had legitimized, at least ostensibly, the adoption of an ideologically driven set of policies by the Brotherhood which mostly had an impact on Egypt’s foreign affairs.

With the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood government in July of 2013, a very unstable situation of civil unrest and conflict unravelled which increased the uncertainty for the country’s future. The military used the civil discontent about the Morsi governance in its advantage and moved to overthrow the government by issuing a memorandum and an ultimatum for its implementation. Through this action the military establishment got to reaffirm its historic role as the safeguard of the nation and regain popular support. In reality, though, by overthrowing Morsi and giving a stop to its policies and constitutional amendments it secured and sustained its own control over the state. It is worth mentioning that the Muslim Brotherhood’s inability to tackle basic problems such as unemployment, budget deficit, inflation, and other major economic challenges (Hussein 2013), led to the
public perception that the country used to be better off under Hosni Mubarak (Younis 2013).

The situation in Egypt left Turkey, among others, unpleased while the military-backed interim government that was established after the coup adopted a rather adventurous foreign policy orientation, not very different from the one of the Muslim Brotherhood. Influenced by Turkey’s pro-Morsi stance and harsh criticism of the military, the interim government announced that it would stop broadcasting Turkish TV series – which have become a regional sensation over the past few years; in addition it stated that it would recognize the Armenian genocide, and also said that Egypt could survive without the US military aid (Alreedy 2013; Sassounian 2013; Fiske 2013). Shortly after, Egypt’s business federation announced that it suspended ties with Turkey until Erdoğan apologised for insulting remarks (Aswat Masriya 2013). These developments indicated an obvious rupture in Egypt’s foreign policy and Turkish-Egyptian relations. Although Egypt under Morsi became ‘the centerpiece of Turkey's foreign policy in the Arab world,’ (Zalewski 2013) his overthrow caught Ankara by surprise – as did the ‘Arab Spring’ – and led it to an impulsive foreign policy towards Egypt. Thus Turkey and particularly Erdoğan, apparently without carefully weighing the costs and benefits, embarked on a harsh criticism of the military and the coup. Of course the AKP’s ideological affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood is not irrelevant in this discussion as it was one of the main reasons why Turkey opposed the overthrow of Morsi.

Overall, in terms of Egypt’s political culture and its response vis-à-vis Turkey, there seem to be different tendencies at the elite and societal, as well as within both of these, levels. At the elite level there is strong opposition to the idea of Egypt emulating the Turkish model although it is true that the Muslim Brotherhood accepted Turkey’s financial and technocratic help. Paradoxically, although the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated the potential of adopting a more assertive foreign policy, even towards Turkey, it was the military that dealt with Ankara and the US in a more blatant way thus projecting itself as more autonomous and assertive. At the societal level the biggest part of the mass political culture was clearly in favour of the Turkish model although the imposition of policies or interference in Egypt’s domestic affairs by Turkey did not seem likely to be accepted or
tolerated; on the other hand a more assertive foreign policy was more favoured. The latter point was common in the Muslim Brotherhood elites and the majority of the society alike. Political conservatism was also favoured by the majority of the society, but because basic social needs were not met by the Muslim Brotherhood a big part of the public opinion shifted again in favour of the military. This is indicative of the fact that Egypt’s society is becoming more politicized and conscious of its rights and the way it could fight for them. Such social processes can affect the way Egypt’s elites perceive their relationship with the masses, the way they conduct (foreign) politics and, by extension, Turkish-Egyptian relations.

Conclusions: Domestic Realities and Geopolitical Implications

One has to admit that, as demonstrated, under the Muslim Brotherhood’s rule the state of affairs between Turkey and Egypt was generally positive. Egypt had indeed accepted Turkey’s financial help and political consultation, at least to a certain extent. Their differences seemed to be of secondary importance at that time, not the least because of the social and political turbulence in Egypt. The 2011 domestic political change in Egypt was followed by mild, albeit noteworthy, shifts in foreign policy, and of course social instability. Should the Muslim Brotherhood had managed to overcome its domestic problems it would not have been difficult to see Egypt entering an era characterized by neo-liberal economics, development, assertive – and probably radicalized – foreign policy; perhaps an exaggerated version of Turkey. And this is because the leadership of a consolidated democracy reflects better the mass political culture, while maintaining many of the features and the agenda that stem from the elite political culture as well. Yet the Brotherhood’s ‘rapid authoritarianization’ of politics led to the end of its governance and to an uncertain future for the organization and Egypt itself.

As regards Turkey, many have argued that it has become increasingly authoritarian over the past decade; but despite all its problems no one can dispute the multileveled success of the AKP. The Turkish experience of the self-declared conservative-democratic AKP, the promoted Turkish model, and the constant collaboration between Ankara and Cairo could have proved valuable to the post-‘Arab Spring’ consolidation of Egypt’s democracy. As
argued, Turkey wants its relations with Egypt to be in a positive state thus having hopes for political, economic, and security benefits. But things have not developed as Ankara wished or expected to, and might even get worse in the future depending, among other things, on Turkey’s stance towards the Egyptian military.

It has become clear that not only did the Turkish model lose much of its credibility but also that it cannot be applied to Egypt. The extent of its success under the Muslim Brotherhood depended on the fact that a part of Egypt’s elite appreciated its usefulness in the consolidation of their power and the country’s development – even though they eventually failed. Yet, the elite political culture of Egypt showed that – in the long term – Egypt, especially if it became stronger, would seek a greater regional role – perhaps even its historic leadership of the Arab world – and thus challenge Turkey and its geopolitical posture. As it occurs, in order for Egypt to play that role, the Muslim Brotherhood does not necessarily need to be in power. The example of the military-backed interim government’s foreign policy showed that from now on Egyptian elites would have to be more responsive to the mass political culture. Although this foreign policy behaviour could change, since crises tend to temporarily affect policy-making, the military demonstrated elements of ideological transformation and political adjustment. In other words, despite the military’s traditional non-adventurist, pro-Western, and pro-status quo foreign policy, it will have to adapt – at least to some extent – to the public attitudes which the Muslim Brotherhood shared, specifically in terms of foreign policy.

Given that Turkey’s regionalized foreign policy over the last decade has been largely based on a clear shift towards Arab/Palestinian support, a stable, prosperous, and powerful Egypt may mean bad news for Turkey. That is because, as we have seen, Egypt has the legacy of being the historical leader of the Arab world and the supporter of the Palestinians; these features have become particularly prominent in Turkey’s foreign policy only recently. Therefore, a re-emerging and powerful Egypt would have much more hegemonic capacity, and thus credibility, in the eyes of the Arab world, not only because of its historical role but also because Turkey is simply not Arab. In addition many Arabs still have a negative historical memory about Turkey which is rooted in the Arab-nationalism of the Ottoman era.
as well as in later nationalist discourse which ‘framed Turkey as a stooge of the West’ (Altunişik 2009, pp. 42). Lastly, the fact that many Arab Muslims see Turkey as not being genuinely Islamic but rather that it is ‘stressing its Islamic identity “when it is convenient”…to make itself look important in the EU and the US,’ adds to the challenge that is the future of Turkish-Egyptian relations (Asl 2011).

Taking all the above mentioned into account, it becomes clear that Turkey and Egypt might well find themselves at odds in the future over the leadership of the Arab world, the capitalization of the Palestinian cause, as well as regional power and hegemonic dominance. However this will depend to a great extent on the outcome of Egypt’s domestic situation, Turkey’s stance towards Egypt and the latter’s reaction, as well as on changes in Turkey which may further affect negatively the Turkish model and Turkish regional capabilities.

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