

# TURKEY'S ARABIAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY AND SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

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**Abstract:** *The Middle East was remolded when the Ottoman Empire was divided through the Sykes Picot Agreement, prepared by Great Britain and France on 19 May, 1916. While the Arabs had expected to gain absolute freedom from the empire, history unfortunately has shown that this was merely a tale well suited to the Arabian Nights. That agreement erased one region, replacing it with another; and the Middle East has primarily been ruled since then under totalitarian regimes, at least until the so-called Arab Spring. The Arab Spring uprisings shook most of the region's totalitarian regimes to their foundations, with very few left untouched. A total of 18 countries were eventually affected: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen. While some, like Bahrain, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen were heavily shaken; some are emerged with little damage, like the UAE and Iran. Nevertheless, surely the Arab Spring is the second biggest event in the Arabian geography since the Sykes Picot agreement. In contrast to Sykes Picot, the Arab Spring was started by the people not by foreign intervention. As mentioned before, Sykes Picot was a backwards step for Arab independence; similarly, neither the current anti-democratic events against Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, nor Syria's current civil war situation are very promising for the future of the Arab Spring. This paper explains developments in Turkey's perceptions of the region and Arabic states since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. To do this, it reviews key events from the Atatürk Era to the Arab Spring. After outlining the historical background of relations between Turkey and the Arabian Middle East, the article discusses the Arab Spring in relation to the heavily affected states. Finally, through this review, Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy towards Syria will be examined.*

**Keywords:** *Turkish Foreign Policy, Humanitarian Diplomacy, Arab Spring, Syrian Civil War*

## **Türkiye'nin Arap Ortadoğusu Politikası ve Suriye İç Savaşı**

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**Özet:** Ortadoğu, 19 Mayıs 1916'da Büyük Britanya ve Fransa tarafından hazırlanan Sykes Picot Anlaşması ile bölünen Osmanlı İmparatorluğu üzerinden yeniden şekillenmiştir. Araplar, imparatorluktan sonra mutlak özgürlüğü beklerken, tarih ne yazık ki bu beklentinin yalnızca Bin Bir Gece Masalları'nda yer almış bir öykü olduğunu göstermiştir. Bu anlaşma bir bölgeyi silmiş; bunu diğer bir başkasının yerine koymuş ve bu süreçten itibaren Ortadoğu, Arap Baharı olarak adlandırılan döneme kadar totaliter rejimlerle yönetilmiştir. Arap Baharı ayaklanmaları bölgedeki çoğu totaliter rejimi ve kurumları derinden sarsmıştır. Zira toplamda 18 ülke bu ayaklanmalardan etkilenmiştir; Cezayir, Bahreyn, Mısır, İran, İsrail ve Filistin Bölgeleri, Ürdün, Kuveyt, Lübnan, Libya, Fas, Umman, Katar, Suudi Arabistan, Suriye, Tunus, Türkiye, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri ve Yemen. Bahreyn, Mısır, Suriye, Libya, Tunus ve Yemen gibi ülkeler bu ayaklanmalardan ağır bir şekilde etkilenirken, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri ve İran gibi ülkeler daha az hasar ile bu süreci atlamaşlardır. Yine de Arap Baharı kitlesel dönüşüm anlamında, Sykes Picot'dan sonra Arap coğrafyasında meydana gelen en büyük ikinci olaydır. Sykes Picot'un aksine Arap Baharı dış müdahalede bulunulmadan halk tabanlı başlatılmıştır. Daha önceden de belirtildiği gibi Sykes Picot, Arap bağımsızlığının aksine atılan bir adımdır; benzer şekilde, Arap Baharı'nın hali hazır sonuçları göz önüne alındığında; hem Mısır'da Muhammed Mursi ve Müslüman Kardeşler'e karşı yapılan anti demokratik hareketler, hem de Suriye'deki mevcut iç savaş Arap Baharı'nın geleceği için olumlu gelişmeler olarak durmamaktadır. Bu makale, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devleti'nin kurulmasından itibaren bölge ve Arap devletleri ile oluşturduğu algıyı ve gelişmeleri açıklamaktadır. Bu noktada, Atatürk döneminden Arap Baharı dönemine kadar meydana gelen önemli gelişmeler incelenecektir. Arap Ortadoğu'su ve Türkiye arasındaki ilişkilerin tarihsel arka planı verildikten sonra makalede, Arap Baharı'ndan ağır bir şekilde etkilenen devletlere değinilerek, Türkiye'nin Suriye'ye yönelik insani diplomasisi açıklanacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türk Dış Politikası, İnsani Diplomasi, Arap Baharı, Suriye İç Savaşı

### **I. INTRODUCTION: A TALE FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS**

The Middle East was remolded when the Ottoman Empire was divided through the Sykes Picot Agreement,<sup>2</sup> prepared by Great Britain and France on 19 May, 1916. While the Arabs had expected to gain absolute freedom from the empire, history unfortunately has shown that this was merely a tale well suited to the Arabian Nights.<sup>3</sup> That agreement erased one region,

<sup>2</sup> For details please check: <http://archive.law.fsu.edu/library/collection/LimitsinSeas/IBS094.pdf>, 8-9, accessed 5 January 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *The Arabian Nights: Tales from A Thousand And One Nights*, Richard Francis Burton (Translator), A.S. Byatt, (New York: Modern Library, 2004).

replacing it with another; and the Middle East has primarily been ruled since then under totalitarian regimes, at least until the so-called “Arab Spring”.

The “Arab Spring” uprisings shook most of the region’s totalitarian regimes to their foundations, with very few left untouched. Even they are Arab or not, a total of 18 countries were eventually affected in the Middle-East region: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen.<sup>4</sup> While some, like Bahrain, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen were heavily shaken; some are emerged with little damage, like the UAE and Iran. Nevertheless, surely the “Arab Spring” is the second biggest event in the Arabian geography since the Sykes Picot agreement. In contrast to Sykes Picot, the “Arab Spring” was started by the people not by foreign intervention. As mentioned before, Sykes Picot was a backwards step for Arab independence; similarly, neither the current anti-democratic events<sup>5</sup> against Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, nor Syria’s current civil war situation are very promising for the future of the “Arab Spring”.

Since the foundation of modern at 1923, Turkey’s relations with the region (especially with Arabian states) has been shaped according to the West<sup>6</sup>. In other words, if we consider Turkish Foreign Policy for Arabian Middle East as a pair of scales; when relations with West goes strong, relations with Arabian Middle East lost weight and when relations with West goes weak, relations with Arabian Middle East gained weight. This two-typed relationship status became a tradition for Turkish Foreign Policy until the late of 1990s, and had a dramatical change with the electoral victory of AK Party/AKP (Justice and Development Party) at 2002. After the AK Party rule, Turkey’s relations with region –especially with Arabian states– has been positively changed until the “Arab Spring”. This paper focuses on Turkey’s open door policy towards Syria in the context of Turkish Foreign Policy tradition. For doing that, key events from the Atatürk Era to the “Arab Spring” will be reviewed. After outlining the historical background of relations between Turkey and the Arabian Middle East, the article discusses the “Arab Spring” in relation to the heavily affected

<sup>4</sup> The National, “The “Arab Spring” Country by Country”, accessed 5 January 2017,

<http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/the-arab-spring-country-by-country#page3>

<sup>5</sup> The Guardian, “How Mohamed Morsi, Egypt’s first elected president, ended up on death row”, accessed 5 January 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/01/mohamed-morsi-execution-death-sentence-egypt>

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, *West* used for US-NATO and European Union axis.

states. Finally, through this review, Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy towards Syria will be examined. By doing so, it's argued that Turkey's foreign policy approach for Arabian Middle East had been defined as a foreign policy tradition which based on single axis that was oriented to the West; after the AK Party, this tradition has been positively changed and as it can be seen in the Syria instance, that change stands still.

## II. ARABIAN MIDDLE EAST IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TRADITION

### A. Atatürk Era (1919-1938)

Just before the World War I (WWI), Arabs rebelled against the Ottoman Empire in order to gain their independence and form their own states. However, this dream, encouraged by British and French support, ended with the disaster of the Sykes Picot agreement in 1916. After 1916, Arabs learned the bitter truth that served the imperial states quite well but not the Arabs.<sup>7</sup> Arabs were left disappointed upon understanding the real goals of Great Britain and France after they shared the territories in question in the Sykes-Picot Agreement; then, with the "Balfour Declaration",<sup>8</sup> Great Britain promised Palestine to the Jews as a homeland. In light of these developments, Arabs sided with Turks against the common enemy: France and Great Britain. Given that Turks had been fighting "İstiklâl Harbi/ the (Turkish) War of Liberation"<sup>9</sup> against the same enemies as Arabs, Arabs felt close to them. In this regard, Turkey's foreign policy towards the Arab Middle-East can be summarized as follows:<sup>10</sup>

- according to *Misak-ı Milli*/National Pact,<sup>11</sup> to ensure the support of the peoples of Arab countries located along Turkey's south-eastern border

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Peter Fitzgerald, "France's Middle Eastern Ambitions, the Sykes-Picot Negotiations, and the Oil Fields of Mosul, 1915-1918", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 66, No. 4, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 697-698.

<sup>8</sup> For details, please check: "Balfour Declaration", accessed 12 January 2017, [http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11\\_doc\\_1926.pdf](http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11_doc_1926.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> The "Turkish War of Independence" started with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's deployment to Samsun at 19 May 1919 and ended in victory for the Turks, with the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. In this war, the people of Anatolia fought and defeated imperial states' armies, including the Çanakkale Zaferi/Gallipoli Victory, which saved Anatolia from invasion.

<sup>10</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "An Analysis of Atatürk's Foreign Policy: 1919-1938", *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, Vol. 20, (Ankara: 1982), 144-145.

<sup>11</sup> Misak-ı Milli/the National Pact, declared all the territory under Ottoman administration during the signing of the Mudros ceasefire agreement, signed on 30 October 1918 at the end of WWI, to be an indivisible whole. Today, the Misak-ı Milli's boundaries (except for Mosul and adding Hatay) are within the Republic of Turkey's boundaries. For more information about Misak-ı Milli, see Umut Uzer, *Identity and Turkish Foreign Policy: The Kemalist Influence in Cyprus and the Caucasus*, (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 44.

- to force France to wage war on two fronts, aiming to make it to come to an agreement on Cilicia in line with Turkish interests
- to trouble Great Britain on the Iraqi border<sup>12</sup>

The goal of these policies was to create buffer zones along Turkey's south-eastern borders and finalize Turkey's south-eastern borders according to the National Pact, based only on Turkish-Arab cooperation. In addition, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk contacted Syrian, Iraqi and Egyptian Arabs to encourage them to organize against Great Britain and France; thus, the "*Syria-Palestine Kuway-i Osmaniyye Heyeti (Ottoman Delegation Forces)*" was established.<sup>13</sup>

### 1. Mosul Issue

Mosul, which had already caused trouble between Turkey and Great Britain in the 1920's and while negotiating the Treaty of Lausanne, again attention during WWI because of its rich natural resources. Mosul was mandated by France in 1916 in the Sykes-Picot Agreement and by Great Britain in 1920 in the San Remo Agreement. During the Lausanne Conference, Turkey argued that Mosul was a majority Turkish people so it should be given to Turkey.<sup>14</sup> Because Great Britain opposed Turkey's position, and they could not solve the problem among themselves, the issue was brought to the League of Nations. At this platform, Turkey suggested to hold a plebiscite but Great Britain objected to this. In 1925, the League of Nations, which was under the control of Great Britain, attached Mosul to Iraq in 1925. Turkey accepted this decision by later signing the treaty.<sup>15</sup>

### 2. Hatay Issue

Turkey's and Syria's borders was defined in Ankara Agreement, signed by Turkey and France in 1921. Hatay was to remain within Syria but under a special regime. This protected the rights and interests of ethnic Turks while their official language would be Turkish. These agreements were confirmed in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. However, France's recognition of Syria and Lebanon's independence in 1936 affected Hatay's legal status. Following these developments, Turkey wanted France to recognize Hatay's

<sup>12</sup> Türel Yılmaz, "Doğu Ülkeleri İle İlişkiler", Haydar Çakmak (ed.) *Türk Dış Politikası: 1919-2008*, (Ankara: Barış Platin Yayınları, 2008), 128.

<sup>13</sup> Yaşar Demir – Kenan Şen, "Doğuş Dönemi İtibariyle Türk-Arap Milliyetçiliği: İşbirliğinden Çatışmaya", *Akademik Ortadoğu*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (Ankara: 2011), 119.

<sup>14</sup> Ali Balcı, *Türkiye Dış Politikası: İlkeler, Aktörler, Uygulamalar*, (İstanbul: Etkileşim Yayınevi, 2013), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Kürkçüoğlu, "An Analysis of Atatürk's Foreign Policy: 1919 – 1938", 182.

independence but as a mandate state, France did not accept because the request threatened to the territorial integrity of Syria.<sup>16</sup> The disagreement was brought to League of Nations, which envisioned an autonomous structure with its own constitution and independence in domestic affairs but dependent on Syria for foreign affairs. At the beginning of 1939, France recognized Hatay's independence as a result of approaching war in and Turkey's efforts. Hatay joined Turkey on 23 June 1939, in return for which Turkey promised to respect Syrian territorial integrity.<sup>17</sup>

### **B. Single Party Era (1938-1950) and Cold War Era (1950 – 1991)**

It could be said that Turkey had good relations with the Arab Middle East during the single-party era was also known that west balanced with west and active objectivity principle was assimilated by foreign policy. For example, alongside Arab countries, Turkey vetoed the United Nation's General Assembly proposal on "the Statute of Distributions of Palestine".<sup>18</sup>

During the Cold War (1950–1991), the following issues shaped Turkey's relations with the Arab Middle East :<sup>19</sup>

- \* Fulfillment of the goal of integration with Europe
- \* Getting economic support from the West, especially the USA
- \* Becoming a member of NATO
- \* Protecting national interests in issues regarding Greece and Cyprus
- \* Countering the Soviet threat

The Democrat Party, which came to power on 14 May 1950, made integration with the west the foundation of its foreign policy, particularly given Stalin's designs on Northeast Anatolia and the Bosphorus. By sending troops to Korea in order to have a better chance of becoming a NATO nation, Turkey showed how determined it was to achieve this goal. In the meantime, Turkey officially recognized Israel, which created tension between Turkey and the Arab states. Overall, Turkey tried to maintain a good relationship with the west even at

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<sup>16</sup> Balcı, *Türkiye Dış Politikası: İlkeler, Aktörler, Uygulamalar*, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Balcı, *Türkiye Dış Politikası: İlkeler, Aktörler, Uygulamalar*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Ortadoğu ile İlişkiler," *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, ed. Baskın Oran, Vol. I, 14th Edition, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 637.

<sup>19</sup> Melek Fırat, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Ortadoğu ile İlişkiler," *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, ed. Baskın Oran, Vol. I, 14th Edition, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), 784-796.

the expense of problems in relations with Arab states. This policy was based on US influence and Soviet threat. From the West's perspective, Turkey was seen as a frontier state, whereas the Arab Middle East point of view, Turkey was seen as the USA's regional policeman.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy in the Arab Middle East could not be free itself from being part of a western axis, although sometimes situations arose that contradicted this. For instance, the Cyprus problem that emerged in 1963 and the subsequent letter from US President Johnson about the issue increased tension between Turkey and the USA. The Turkish military's Cyprus Peace Operation, starting on 20 July 1974, initially did not face serious criticism from the USA. However, the second operation beginning on 13 August 1974 led to serious repercussions from the West, with the USA imposing an arms embargo on Turkey between 1975 and 1978. In contrast, Arab Middle East states (such as Iran, Afghanistan and Libya) supported Turkey politically, financially and militarily during the operation<sup>21</sup>.

These developments made Turkey reverse its previous reluctance to take a closer interest in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). During the Arab-Israeli War of 1967-1973, Turkey supported the Arab States, for example forbidding US use of İncirlik Airbase to help Israel. After the war, Turkey argued that UN Article 242 should be applied to make Israel return captured territories. In addition, Turkey's Israel ambassador was recalled, with relationships continuing on a minimal basis.<sup>22</sup> A final example of Turkey distancing itself from a Western based foreign policy during the Cold War was Turkey's support for Egypt in the Suez Canal conflict.<sup>23</sup>

### **C. Post-Cold War Era (1991-2001)**

In this period, named the 'new order' by the USA, Turkey's foreign policy focused on the following issues:<sup>24</sup>

- \* Integration with the EU

<sup>20</sup> Erman Akıllı, *Türkiye'de Devlet Kimliği ve Dış Politika*, (Ankara: Nobel Yayınevi, 2013), 50-57.

<sup>21</sup> Melek Fırat, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Ortadoğu ile İlişkiler", 786.

<sup>22</sup> Avi Shlaim, "Israel between East and West, 1948-56", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 Nov., 2004, 670.

<sup>23</sup> Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Ortadoğu ile İlişkiler", 646.

<sup>24</sup> Hasan Ünal; "2000-2008: Dönemin Dış Politika Değerlendirmesi", Haydar Çakmak (ed.) *Türk Dış Politikası: 1919-2008*, (Ankara: Barış Platin Yayınları, 2008), 1042-1043.

\* Maintaining and improving the alliance or strategic partnership with the USA

\* Strengthening relationships with Russia and Central Asia

\* inaccurately interpreting developments in the Middle East, avoiding positions which may harm Turkish interests and contributing to regional peace processes

\* Solving the PKK problem

When Saddam Hussein's administration crushed the uprising in Northern Iraq in March 1991, there was a significant flow of Kurdish refugees into Turkey and Iran. Then, the First Gulf War and increasingly bloody PKK actions forced Turkey to rethink its position and its relations in the region. Syrian support for the PKK<sup>25</sup> and Egypt's<sup>26</sup> negative reaction to Israeli-Turkish convergence created tensions that damaged foreign relations. Consequently, the balance of Turkey's foreign policy started to shift towards the West again while relationships with the east weakened.

#### **D. After September 11 (2001–2011)**

The attacks on the World Trade Center in September 11, 2001 affected the whole world, leading to a shift in military and political systems and radical change in security perceptions, with the Middle East being particularly affected. Turkey's foreign policy in the region was also changed in style in line with its general foreign policy in the early 2000s and after 9/11. This change was determined by several key factors:

\* Changing regional and global circumstances

\* Developments in Turkey's relationship with the EU

\* Changes in Turkey's strategic perceptions

\* The AK Party government's new foreign policy approach (multi-axis, proactive, zero problem policies)<sup>27</sup>

The new regional and global circumstances included the global systemic crisis following the end of the Cold War and the resulting increased geo-economic,

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<sup>25</sup> Nur Bilge Criss, "The nature of PKK terrorism in Turkey", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 18, No.1, (London: Routledge, 1995), 17-37.

<sup>26</sup> Efraim Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Balcı, *Türkiye Dış Politikası: İlkeler, Aktörler, Uygulamalar*, 285-291.



geo-strategic and geo-political complexity. These complexities created uncertainty and disorder in the international equilibrium. Naturally, Turkey was also affected by this new fragility.

Another dynamic affecting Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East after 9/11 is the deepening of relations with the EU after Turkey became an official candidate in 1999, which increased the impression of Turkey as a self-confident and stable country in its relations that is able to and keen on taking the initiative. In this positive atmosphere after the AK Party came to power in 2002, Turkey developed an effective multi-axis, proactive and zero problem policy for foreign relations, including in the Middle East. These political developments also improved Arab states' image of Turkey as a respectable Islamic country.<sup>28</sup> In particular, Turkey was now free of its Cold War image as the USA's regional policeman. As a result, relations between Turkey and the Arab Middle East improved.

Relationships with Syria, which was had been threatened by the 1998 Adana Treaty, improved after Bashar Assad took power in Syria in 2000, with increasing trade and developments in border commerce. Relations with Iran also improved, with agreements for Turkey to buy natural gas, along with mutual investments and increasing trade. In addition, they decided to develop their cultural and educational relationship. By the end of 2008, trade between Turkey and Iran was worth 7 billion USD, making Iran Turkey's 8th biggest trade partner.<sup>29</sup> Another sign of this deepening relationship is that Turkey imports 36.4% of its oil and 11% of its natural gas from Iran, while Turkey, Iran and Brazil have signed a uranium trade treaty. Before the second Gulf War and the US intervention in Iraq, Turkey had signed a billion USD trade agreement with Saddam Hussein's government. In short, there are various clear indications during this period that Turkey was acting as an autonomous actor in the Middle East.<sup>30</sup> As it can be seen, Turkey's relations with Arabian Middle East that has been folded into a null single axis tradition has been broken with the paradigm shift in the Turkish Foreign Policy with AK Party.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Yasin Aktay; "Arap Baharında Seçim Rüzgarları ve Türkiye Algısı", *Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü (SDE)*, accessed 17 January 2017, <http://www.sde.org.tr/tr/kose-vazilari/1051/arap-baharinda-secim-ruzgarlari-ve-turkiye-algisi.aspx>

<sup>29</sup> Fatma Sarıaslan, "2000'li Yıllarda Türkiye-İran Ekonomik İlişkileri", *Akademik Ortadoğu*, (Ankara: 2012), Vol. 7, No. 2, 74-75.

<sup>30</sup> Bayram Sinkaya, *Introduction to Middle East Politics: Leading Factors, Actors and Dynamics*, (Ankara: 2016, ORSAM), 2-4.

<sup>31</sup> Erman Akılı – Federico Donelli, "Reinvention of Turkish Foreign Policy in Latin America: The Cuba Case", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (Ankara: SETA, 2016), 161.

### III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF A CIVILIAN UPRISING: THE “ARAB SPRING”

The “Arab Spring” was a unique event for the Arab world in that, for the first time, its people had the chance and the will to form their own future. It was a rare opportunity for Arabs to topple the totalitarian regimes that had ruled for decades and finally establish a permanent grassroots democracy. Thus, this process represented a transition from totalitarianism to pluralist democracy state controlled by the public itself.<sup>32</sup> The “Arab Spring” cannot be simply defined in terms of one hopeless man’s self-immolation; rather it was an outcry of people who felt humiliated, and had suffered inequality and lost their dignity under the rule of tyrannies. A single suicidal act could not have engulfed almost the whole continent. Nonetheless, it’s clear to emphasize on other factor’s effects that empowered the ignition of the downfall for tyrannies of Arabian states.

For instance, Nurullah Ardiç argues that three main “immediate factors” contributed to the “Arab Spring”, including the search for social and economic justice, demands for social and political liberties, and a desire for dignity and respect based on frustration with the region’s oppressive regimes.<sup>33</sup> As Muhittin Ataman similarly observes, the street protests focused on three values: “bread, freedom, dignity”.<sup>34</sup>

Ardiç also notes the distinctive role of information and communication technologies (ICTs), which was another urban characteristic of the “Arab Spring”: large-scale protests and demonstrations were mostly organized through the use of previously unavailable ICT’s, including social media (particularly Facebook and Twitter), cell phones and satellite TV channels (particularly Al-Jazeera).<sup>35</sup>

For many, the biggest achievement of the “Arab Spring” was to demonstrate that Arab dictators can be removed through a grassroots popular revolt rather than a military coup or foreign intervention, as used to be the norm. By the end of 2011, governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen had been swept

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<sup>32</sup> “After the Arab Spring”, Al Jazeera World, accessed 1 February 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraworld/2016/02/arab-spring-160217062821595.html> .

<sup>33</sup> Nurullah Ardiç, “Understanding the ‘Arab Spring’: Justice, Dignity, Religion and International Politics”, *Afro Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, (Istanbul: MUSIAD, 2012), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Muhittin Ataman, “Prof. Dr. Ataman: Arap baharında kitleler, adalet, ekmek ve özgürlük istedi”, *Cihan*, accessed 30.01.2017, <https://www.cihan.com.tr/tr/prof-dr-ataman-arap-baharinda-kitleler-adalet-ekmek-ve-ozgurluk-istedi-658403.htm>

<sup>35</sup> Ardiç, “Understanding the “Arab Spring”: Justice, Dignity, Religion and International Politics”, 19.

away by popular revolts, in an unprecedented show of people power.<sup>36</sup> However, after 2011, in addition to international military interventions the grassroots scenario began to change. The unfortunate outcome was that international rivalry caused civil wars in most of the Arab states, with Syria, in particular, still suffering from five years of civil war.

#### IV. TURKEY'S OPEN DOOR POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA

Starting with Tunisia, the "Arab Spring" had a domino effect, reaching Syria on 15 March 2011, when protesters wrote anti-regime slogans on walls in Dara. When Syrian police immediately arrested them, their families protested and demanded the release of their sons. After they were harshly treated by the police, the protests spread, igniting the "Arab Spring" in Syria.<sup>37</sup> Opposition parties organized and carried out their first action on March 17 2011, the 'The Day of Rage',<sup>38</sup> which spread protests across the country. Meanwhile, in Dara, demonstrators was attacked by the security forces with three being killed.<sup>39</sup>

Having been sparked by these protests, Syria's civil war continues, causing hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths, and forcing millions of people, mostly from Syria's provinces bordering Turkey, to leave their homes and became refugees. New arrivals are expected throughout 2016. Half of the refugees from the Syria are children.<sup>40</sup> Thanks to Turkey's hospitality, based on the Turkey's humanitarian foreign policy, Turkey is currently hosting over than two million Syrian refugees, and this number is gradually increasing.

#### "Open Door Policy"

Turkey's 'open door' policy towards Syrian refugees can be summarized in the words of Rumi's poem: "*Come, come, whoever you are...*".<sup>41</sup> As in the poem,

<sup>36</sup> Primoz Manfreda, "Arab Spring" Impact on the Middle East: How Did the Uprisings of 2011 Change the Region?", *About News*, accessed 30 January 2017, <http://middleeast.about.com/od/humanrightsdemocracy/tp/Arab-Spring-Impact-On-The-Middle-East.htm>

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Shadid, "In Syria, Reports of Arrests Proliferate", *New York Times*, accessed 30 January 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/03/world/middleeast/03syria.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/03/world/middleeast/03syria.html?_r=2)

<sup>38</sup> "Syrian protesters plan 'day of rage'", *Independent*, accessed 30 January 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syrian-protesters-plan-day-of-rage-2201115.html>

<sup>39</sup> "Middle East unrest: Three killed at protest in Syria", *BBC News*, accessed 30 January 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12791738>

<sup>40</sup> United Nations Refugee Agency, "2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Turkey", accessed 30 January 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html>

<sup>41</sup> "Come, come, whoever you are. Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving. It doesn't matter. Ours is not a caravan of despair. Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times. Come, yet again, come, come." This famous poem of (Mawlānā Jalāl-ad-Din Muhammad Rūmī) Rumi also sheds

when Syrians began arriving at the Turkish-Syrian border in spring 2011, all were allowed to enter Turkey.<sup>42</sup> Since then, Turkey has maintained a consistently high-standard emergency response, implementing a temporary protection regime that ensures non-refoulement in 22 camps, where an estimated 217,000 people are staying. Turkey is currently constructing two additional camps.<sup>43</sup>

Turkey's open door policy rests on three pillars: temporary protection, non-refoulement and humanitarian diplomacy.<sup>44</sup> First, in October 2011, Turkey extended temporary protection to Syrian refugees, defined in Article 91 of Law No. 6458 as follows:<sup>45</sup>

*“Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection. The actions to be carried out for the reception of such foreigners into Turkey; their stay in Turkey and rights and obligations; their exit from Turkey; measures to be taken to prevent mass influxes; cooperation and coordination among national and international institutions and organizations; determination of the duties and mandate of the central and provincial institutions and organizations shall be stipulated in a Directive to be issued by the Council of Ministers. Identify methods and measures to be employed in case of a mass Influx is among the duties of Migration Policies Board which was established by Law on Foreigners and International Protection”.*<sup>46</sup>

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light on Turkey's understanding of humanitarianism, which also reflects on Turkish cultural diplomacy. For a detailed study on Turkish foreign aids and humanitarian diplomacy, see Erman AKILLI (ed.), *Türkiye’de ve Dünyada Dış Yardımlar*, (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management, Temporary Protection in Turkey, accessed 1 February 2017, <http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection-in-turkey-917-1064-4768-icerik>

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Refugee Agency, “2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Turkey”, accessed 30 January 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html>

<sup>44</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Limits of an Open Door Policy”, *Brookings*, accessed 31 January 2017, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/06/27-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-kirisçi>

<sup>45</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, *Temporary Protection in Turkey*, accessed 1 February 2017, <http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection-in-turkey-917-1064-4768-icerik>

<sup>46</sup> Temporary Protection Regulation (Council of Ministers Decision No: 2014/6883) dated 13/10/2014 was published in the framework of Article 91 of Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP). Please check: *Temporary Protection Regulation*, accessed 1 February 2017, <http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/dokuman28.pdf>

This extension of temporary protection to Syrian refugees by the Turkish government is a new and welcome development.<sup>47</sup> Second, the open door policy ensures respect for the principle of non-refoulement, one of the main pillars of international refugee law and an indispensable aspect of protection. Under Article 6 of Turkey's 'Temporary Protection Regulation', non-refoulement is defined as follows:

*"(1) No one within the scope of this Regulation shall be returned to a place where he or she may be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment or, where his/her life or freedom would be threatened on account of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. (2) The Directorate General may take administrative actions regarding foreigners who cannot be removed from our country pursuant to the paragraph (1) even though they are to be removed from our country pursuant to relevant legislation."*<sup>48</sup>

Non-refoulement requires the registration of refugees, a procedure which is critical to upholding this principle. A registration process for the refugees in camps has been put into place and the government is also working on completing the registration of refugees living outside camps, irrespective of whether they entered the country legally or illegally. The open door policy also allows Syrians with passports to enter Turkey freely while treating those Syrians who may have entered Turkey without papers in a similar fashion. Since the beginning of the crisis, close to 124,000 refugees are reported to have returned to Syria - all on a voluntary basis.<sup>49</sup>

Third, the government has committed itself to providing the best possible living conditions and humanitarian assistance for the refugees. Together with the Turkish Red Crescent (KIZILAY), the Turkish Disaster Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) has been actively involved in setting up and running the refugee camps. AFAD also oversees the provision of education and health services, and supervises day-to-day management of the camps.<sup>50</sup> In other words, Turkish humanitarian diplomacy carried out by those institutions in the borders of Turkey. Besides governmental institutions, NGOs such as the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) are also involved.

<sup>47</sup> Kirişçi, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Limits of an Open Door Policy".

<sup>48</sup> *Temporary Protection Regulation*, accessed 1 February 2017, <http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/dokuman28.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Kirişçi, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Limits of an Open Door Policy".

<sup>50</sup> Kirişçi, "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Limits of an Open Door Policy".

Through its humanitarian diplomacy, implemented alongside its humanitarian aid operations, the IHH aims to secure access to civilians in the most efficient way possible by undertaking the roles of arbitration and mediation between warring parties in crisis zones.<sup>51</sup> Turkey's humanitarian mission has also benefitted from international assistance. For instance, since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has worked closely with Turkey to provide economic and expert support through the provision of core relief items, field monitoring and technical advice. The table below presents UNHCR 2015 planning figures for Turkey:<sup>52</sup>

| <b>UNHCR 2015 planning figures for Turkey</b> |                             |                         |                          |                         |                          |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Type of population</b>                     | <b>Origin</b>               | <b>January 2015</b>     |                          | <b>December 2015</b>    |                          |
|   |                             | <b>Total in country</b> | <b>assisted by UNHCR</b> | <b>Total in country</b> | <b>assisted by UNHCR</b> |
| <b>Refugees</b>                               | <b>Afghanistan</b>          | 3,930                   | 3,930                    | 3,930                   | 3,930                    |
|   | <b>Iraq</b>                 | 25,470                  | 25,470                   | 37,470                  | 37,470                   |
|   | <b>Syrian Arab Rep.</b>     | 1,500,000               | 1,500,000                | 1,700,000               | 1,700,000                |
|   | <b>Various</b>              | 12,070                  | 12,070                   | 17,070                  | 17,070                   |
| <b>Asylum-seekers</b>                         | <b>Afghanistan</b>          | 32,330                  | 32,330                   | 42,330                  | 42,330                   |
|   | <b>Islamic Rep. of Iran</b> | 10,250                  | 10,250                   | 14,250                  | 14,250                   |
|   | <b>Iraq</b>                 | 43,070                  | 43,070                   | 67,070                  | 67,070                   |
|   | <b>Various</b>              | 5,820                   | 5,820                    | 6,820                   | 6,820                    |
| <b>Stateless</b>                              | <b>Stateless</b>            | 330                     | -                        | 550                     | -                        |

<sup>51</sup> Humanitarian Relief Foundation, "Humanitarian Diplomacy in Syria", accessed 1 February 2017, <http://www.ihh.org.tr/en/main/pages/suriye-insani-diplomasi/314>

<sup>52</sup> United Nations Refugee Agency, "2015 UNHCR country operations profile – Turkey", accessed 30 January 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html>

|                          |                           |           |           |           |           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Others of concern</b> | <b>Russian Federation</b> | 310       | -         | 310       | -         |
| <b>Total</b>             |                           | 1,633,560 | 1,632,930 | 1,889,780 | 1,888,930 |

### CONCLUSION: AN “ARAB SPRING” OR A HARSH WINTER?

The “Arab Spring”, is a democratization process which started in Egypt and Tunisia before making its way around the Arab geography. The first step was the death of a 26-year-old street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi,<sup>53</sup> who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010 in protest against economic inequality, corruption and political injustice. President Zeynel Abidin bin Ali’s security forces unsuccessfully tried to suppress the riots triggered by this death. The rioting and upheaval, like a domino effect, made its way around the region, toppling longstanding authoritarian regimes. The Arab state tradition, in which rulers remain in power until they die, was destroyed by the power of the people.

Turkey’s attitude towards the “Arab Spring” supported democracy, welcoming these countries’ moves towards democracy in parallel with basic state principles and supporting the desire of the region’s people for more freedom, democracy and human rights. Because Turkey advocated that these improvements should take place through the internal dynamics of these countries, it did not approve of foreign intervention, and continued Turkey’s longstanding policy towards Arab nations, namely not to meddle with the internal affairs of other countries.

Therefore, when the first wave of Syrian refugees arrived in spring 2011, Turkey admitted them. Since then, Turkey has maintained an emergency response of a consistently high standard and declared a temporary protection regime, ensuring non-refoulement and assistance in 22 camps, where an estimated 217,000 people are staying. Turkey is currently constructing two additional camps. Turkey’s open door policy rises on three pillars: ‘temporary protection’, ‘non- refoulement’ and humanitarian diplomacy.

<sup>53</sup> Hernando De Soto, “The Real Mohamed Bouazizi”, *Foreign Policy*, accessed 17 January 2017, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/16/the\\_real\\_mohamed\\_bouazizi](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/16/the_real_mohamed_bouazizi)

As it can be seen through historical background, relations that started from 1923 to late 1990s, Turkey's perception towards to Arabian States had been molded in a single axis foreign policy understanding, which shaped due the relations of Turkey and West. This kind of tradition in the foreign policy kept Turkey's dialogue null with the Arabian states. But the paradigm shift in the foreign policy thanks to AK Party, this null kind of dialogue towards to Arabian States changed into a multi-dimensional relation that blooms trade partnerships and strong bilateral cooperations. Nonetheless, while strengthening relations with Arabian Middle East; having remained close to the West since the 1950s, based on NATO membership and European Union negotiations, Turkey has now become a regional power capable of autonomous decisions and actions. Because of its geopolitical location, Turkey is unable to operate a single axis foreign policy. Instead, it must advance regional relations and maintain its status as a model country and beacon for humanitarianism in the region. Therefore, even the tradition change in Turkish foreign policy towards to Arabian States has been declined due to aftermaths of the "Arab Spring", still Turkey's helping hand reaches whom are in need.

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