A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT IRAN AND TURKEY: ASSESSING TRENDS AND TRANSFORMATION

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Three decades after Iran's Islamic revolution, the revolutionary fervor has slowly morphed into new social, economic, and political demands for jobs, economic development, housing, health care, and fundamental freedoms. Like the attempts of other revolutionary regimes, the Islamic Republic's attempt to advance its ideological goals has been replaced by pragmatic approaches and policies. The youth bulge, rising economic and political grievances, and the rapidly increasing rural-to-urban migration have created a whole host of

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problems in need of new solutions. Iran's foreign policy has been influenced by mixed but seemingly contradictory motivations, including Islamic ideology and identity, support for regional détente and allies, such as Hamas in the Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and a pragmatic approach toward resolving regional tensions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bahrain. In the meantime, Iran has had to face U.S.-led sanctions and containment.

Internally, the rise of "Green Movement" in the post-2009 presidential election era has created political ruptures within the regime's leadership, on the one hand, and between the reformist movement and the regime in power, on the other. The growth of cyber civil society and the increasing Internet penetration has led to the expansion of public space likely to challenge the state in coming years. Moreover, a feminist awakening has emerged slowly but steadily in the post-revolutionary Iran. Over 63 percent of university graduates in Iran are female, and unlike many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Iranian women are visible in all areas of public life as lawyers, doctors, artists, publishers, journalists, bloggers, politicians, students and professors (Bashi, 2010:37-38).

Similarly, Turkey has made great strides, since the post-Cold War era, in developing its civil society and living up to democratic standards, partly because of its desire to join the European Union and partly because of the necessity to come to terms with the vast socioeconomic changes transpiring within it. Most notably, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has elevated civilian leadership over the military by relying on democratic governance and assuming an important regional role. Turkey's open door and free market economic policies have led to porous borders and absorptive measures, as evidenced by the fact that more Bosnians, Albanians,

Chechens, and Abkhazians live in Turkey today than in their original countries. Turkey has successfully managed its foreign policy with respect to its immediate neighbors (Iran and Iraq) and other troubled countries in the region (Afghanistan), while simultaneously pursuing its strategic alliance with the West.

Despite their rich and diverse historical experiences, Iran and Turkey have thus far avoided defining their approaches to the region as being in competition with one another. Iran's relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia, just as the relations of these two states with Turkey, are among the most difficult relations to manage in the region. The emerging closer ties between Iran and Turkey, however, are one of the most potentially dramatic diplomatic dynamics in the post-Soviet era, with profound regional and possibly global implications (Mesbahi, 2010:182-184). Whereas in Turkey, a capable leadership proved to be the key to the successful operation of civil society and played an effective role in the transition to democracy, Iran's civil society lacked and still lacks robust leaders capable of forging ahead with a concrete strategy and plan of action (Razzaghi, 2010).

This paper's motivating and basic research question is: Why has Turkey risen in its economic and political stature in world politics, while Iran has fallen behind? To answer this question, we attempt a comparative study of Iran and Turkey within the context of their domestic politics and foreign policy, in order to demonstrate similarities and differences in their attempts to gain regional influence, expand civil society, and promote democratic-Islamic models with a view toward forecasting what lies ahead. Yet despite their varied interests, Iran and Turkey share common goals: promoting regional détente and Islamic identity. Our central argument is that economic

development and political freedoms are the function of domestic politics and foreign policy. Turkey's success can be attributed to its steady and dependable relations with the West and an inclusionary and democratic politics at home buttressed by long-term pragmatic planning and strategies. By contrast, Iran's troubled relations with the West, ideological makeup of its regime, gaping holes in its leadership structure, and various restrictions on the expansion of civil society have all undermined not just Iran's ability to develop a coherent foreign policy in the region, but also its potential to become a dominant player there.

IRAN'S TRANSFORMATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY (1997-PRESENT)

Since the 1990s, the debate surrounding civil society in Iran has intensified. But more specifically, since the election of President Mohammad Khatami in May 1997, Iran has taken a huge step toward the creation of a vibrant civil society. The Khatami administration (1997-2005) changed the terms of debate over governance and democracy. In keeping with the rule of law, the civil society discourse advanced the idea of reconciling cultural and religious customs with the emerging standards of international legitimacy. There emerged sharp disagreement among the ruling elite as to how to respond to the civil society's growing demands on the political regime, with the conservatives favoring the all-too familiar mode of social control and reformists calling for an open society.

The rise of Khatami was preceded by a decade of change in the post-Khomeini's era and the presidency of President Rafsanjani (1989-1997), which left Iran a "theocracy without a chief theocrat," in

which the populist fervor of the early years of the Islamic revolution—with its street demonstrations and popular display of support—was gone (Limbert, 1995:51). In the Aftermath of Khomeini's death, factional dispute and competition surged. A national referendum abolished the post of prime minister and replaced it with a popularly elected president as head of the government who did not need to be approved by the Majlis (parliament). This also meant that the *velayat-e-faqih* (rule by jurist-consult or the supreme leader) would no longer dominate the political sphere. The president, therefore, emerged as the most powerful figure in the state. This transformation, according to one expert, marked the "the transition from the consolidation phase to the reconstruction phase of the Islamic Revolution." (Milani, 1993:359).

Although the Majlis was important in promoting popular sovereignty in the post-Khomeini era, it failed to provide genuinely broad political participation. Parliamentary elections were manipulated by oversight committees that controlled access to the Majlis (Bill, 1993:405). The victory of pragmatists demonstrated that Iran's devastated economy and practical needs had replaced vague political and ideological slogans. Rafsanjani's liberalization program (1989-1997) encountered many difficulties, including low levels of private investment, low growth rates, budget bottlenecks, and mounting foreign debt. Poor policies, corruption, and mismanagement of resources also complicated the state's liberalization programs (Wright, 1996:163). The price of oil during Rafsanjani's presidency dropped sharply, undermining many of the state's economic plans.

The expansion of modern civil society, manifested in the growth of professional associations and trade organizations, was viewed as new setbacks for Iran's hard-line clergy, whose theocratic vision and

narrow definition of loyalty to the Islamic Republic have alienated large segments of Iranian society. The Assembly of experts, dominated by conservative clerics and responsible for the selection of the Supreme Leader, reinforced its conservative composition again in elections of October 23, 1998, in which the conservatives won 54 out of the 86 seats and Khatami's supporters gained only 13 seats, and 16 seats went to independents (Kazemi, 1995)

Threatened by reformists' agenda and ideas, the radical vigilantes altered their approach, expanding their strategy of *defamation* in dealing with internal reformists who operate within Islamic legal bounds, to include *disappearance* and *murder*—a violent approach reminiscent of killings of Iranian dissidents abroad. The defamation tactics included calculated attacks on major political and religious figures. These included casting by parliament of a vote of no confidence against the former Minister of Interior Abdollah Nouri, who criticized the judiciary's "arbitrary" actions; putting on trial and in jail the former Tehran mayor, Gholam-Hussein Karabaschi, whose newspaper, *Hamshahri*, had bolstered Khatami's presidential campaign, on charges of mismanagement and malfeasance; and placing under house confinement Grand Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazari, who appealed for increased political pluralism and respect for human rights.

The defamation attacks continued by vigilante groups, known as *Ansar-e Hezbollah* (the Partisans of the Party of God), which "serve as enforcers for conservative clerics." Such assaults took the forms of verbal and physical attacks on certain media and their closure, frequent and violent disruptions and the cancellation of public lectures by the philosopher Abdol-Karim Soroush, vandalizing the offices of the opposing media and organizations, and beating up their leaders.

The serial killings in the country, which led to the slayings in late 1998 of several prominent secular critics of the Islamic government's conservative faction, renewed the fears of a long-anticipated ideological turmoil and political schisms with the possibility of inciting further violence throughout the country. In the ensuing weeks, the kidnapping and slayings of several writers who were determined to form a secular writers' association, and other outspoken social critics of the conservative clerical establishment, fueled fears of a broader violence. Editors of journals and monthly political and economic reviews, were often threatened with death should they gave interviews to the foreign press (Monshipouri, 2008:109). In the end, reformers' strategy of working within the system to achieve extensive reforms utterly failed, as the crackdown on the reformists continued unabated. By 2005, the reformers' efforts aimed at democratizing internal politics and making civil society work by casting the relationship between the state and the citizen in a new light appeared a distant prospect.

THE RISE OF POPULISM IN IRAN

The dramatic changes in the 1990s presented opportunities to build bridges between the Iranian people and global civil society and international human rights movements. Younger Iranians openly questioned the state's practices and policies. Many individuals and groups routinely castigated the government publicly for its restrictions on basic civil and political liberties. A low turnout in Iran's disputed parliamentary elections of 2004 returned the country to a politically restricted environment reminiscent of the early years of the Islamic Republic. A widespread national apathy and an active resistance by reformist groups, who boycotted these parliamentary elections, along

with the wave of resignations by Iranian political officials, placed Iran's parliament in the hands of conservatives. These developments were viewed by many Iranians as a blow to Iran's reform movement.

In July 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran's mayor, became the nation's new president. During his tenure as a mayor, Ahmadinejad reversed many of the changes transpired by previous moderate and reformist mayors, putting serious religious emphasis on the activities of the cultural centers founded by previous mayors. President Ahmadinejad, supported by hardliners, insisted on enforcing Iran's strict Islamic dress code, which obliged Iranian women to wear proper *hijab*. The social climate of openness under Khatami suffered several setbacks under the new regime.

Ahmadinejad, however, appointed a woman as a Vice-President. Fatemeh Javadi was appointed as Vice-President and Head of the Environment Protection Organization. Javadi's appointment indicated that President Ahmadinejad was following the footsteps of his predecessor. Javadi who held a doctorate in geology, was expected to be the only female in the Iranian cabinet and would replace Massoumeh Ebtekar, who was the only female in the cabinet of President Khatami. Moreover, the Western music was banned from Iran's Radio and Television stations, as the new president promised to confront the Western cultural invasion and to promote Islamic values. The ban on media also included censorship of the content of films. All this was the beginning of yet another wave of cultural war at a time when Western music and films were widely available on DVDs on the black market.

Today, many Iranian homes have satellite televisions, listen to Voice of America, and watch CNN and BBC world news. Iran has the highest number of the Internet users in the region. An underground

culture has emerged in Iran's social and cultural life in the face of government-imposed restrictions. Modernization and technology have radically altered the cultural life of many Iranians. Closing the borders in the name of reverting to the cultural revolution of the early years of the revolution is bound to be untenable. Iran faces many structural obstacles en route to building a civil society. For these barriers to be removed, there needs to be a balance between civil society and state organizations. Such a balance requires the existence of an independent judiciary, separation of powers, and a free press. The absence of these conditions in Iran is further confounded by the fact that ideological loyalties and commitments continue to determine the shape of political groups and the degree to which they can function within a safe environment (Monshipouri, 2008:111-112).

The gap between Iranian politics and society has widened. Although Iranian society has been exposed to modern ideas and constructions, Iranian politics has straddled between autocratic and democratic tendencies. The result has been an intensified power struggle among several factions of the clerical regime and the presidency, with masses of ordinary people, secularists, and Islamic reformists caught in the middle. Iranian politics continues to grapple with the reality of civil society and the rule of law—elements critical to any sustainable move toward democratization. In the meantime, Iranian society has been fully imbued with modern ideas such as civil society, peaceful democratic change through civil disobedience, and internationally recognized human rights.

Islamic reformists can play a key part in nudging along the society forward and the country toward regional notoriety. Change is going to be slow, homegrown, and orderly. It is impossible to prevent the expansion of civil society in modernizing societies such as Iran. Civil

society is most likely to expand its political significance in the wake of a wave of change in the region, especially since the 2011 uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. Time is on the side of younger generation who is wired up and connected to the rest of world. It is now a matter of time before democratic forces—religious as well as secular—prevail over reactionary forces.

OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS

The "green movement" or "green wave" that engulfed Iran during the 2009 election highlighted the political and social energies of a youthful movement that manifested a drive for a peaceful democratic change facilitated by new social media tools. The participants in this new movement demonstrated that they will not settle for anything short of a just and democratic order. The continuing images of the call for democratic change that now emerge on daily basis in Iran are in fact powerful symbols for the strength of the "green wave." Facilitated by constant digital interaction via instant messaging and social network services, such as Twitter and YouTube, the "green wave" drew immediate attention to human and a vibrant civil society in Iran.

It is important to recognize that digital technologies and devices alone cannot produce change. Fundamental changes require sacrifices made by people, proper leadership, and legitimate institutions, and far-reaching social power. There is no denying that post-presidential election protests in Iran have done more to mobilize the younger generation—a generation that can no longer be intimidated into submission. For the Iranian youth, the bitter irony is that the Islamic Republic supports such regional causes as the Palestinian *Intifada* (uprising), while at the same time it suppresses its own domestic

Intifada. How could the Islamic Republic advocate democracy for the Iraqis, the Afghans, and for the Palestinians, yet deny it to its own people? Deepening rifts within the clerical establishment over how to deal with the post-election turmoil point to a crisis of authority that is potentially a far greater menace to the regime's survival than the crisis of belongingness among the youth (Monshipouri and Assareh, 2009). The absence of internal democratic reforms is likely to impede Iran's progress toward achieving regional and geopolitical aspirations. Iran's foreign policy and its attempt at breaking out of the isolation is a function of improving relations with the United States, Western powers, and regional actors such as Turkey.

TURKEY'S TRANSFORMATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Since AKP took over office in Turkey in 2002, the country has been under the international lens mostly for its new and whimsical foreign policy and also its unprecedented economic recovery and growth in modern Turkey's history. Concomitantly with these developments, the rise of civil society and the democratization process have also been conspicuous in Turkey. While many argue that some of these enhancements in Turkey's further modernization process originate merely from AKP's ability to form a single party government which entails stability, others argue that there are additional factors such as the European Union integration process, internet and telecommunication penetration to the society and the dynamic Turkish youth that takes ownership of its own country's future (Kardas, 2010:115-117). In this section, we will try to highlight what factors were crucial in Turkey's transformation and how these trends and transformations will construct tomorrow's Turkey.

DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

The military coup of 1980 in Turkey further adjusted the political system of the nation. Following the coup, a military enforced government was founded and that very government under Kenan Evren's presidency implemented the 1982 constitution that AKP finally amended through a referendum in 2010. While Turkey was busy determining its own future, the end of Cold War and the new international and regional dynamics forced Turkey to reshuffle its priorities and political agenda. Following the soul searching years of the 1990s, Turkey met its new ruling party: AKP. Although scholars and international media primarily credit AKP for the transformation in Turkey, these alterations in Turkish identity and politics still find their roots in the 1980s.

During Turgut Ozal's neo-liberal economic opening and modernization of Turkey, Ozalism in foreign policy also entailed a rediscovery of Turkish identity as Muslim and a reevaluation of its past as an empire (Alessandri, 2010:4). Such re-appreciation of critical elements of the Turkish heritage, which had been too hastily buried after the establishment of the secular Republic in 1924, were readopted by Ozal first, and now by AKP. This is probably one of the most important stepping-stones in establishing a democratic society that defines its present and future while comfortably embracing its past.

After Ozal, Turkey also witnessed paradoxical political developments in the 1990s. For instance, secular democracy's pride and joy, the first female Prime Minister Tansu Ciller entered in a coalition government with Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party, which employed a fundamentalist Islamic discourse. Despite this and similar paradoxes, Turkey maintained its focus from the 1980s to develop a

"trading state" that is completely nested in the world economy but also continued to evaluate its Turkish and Muslim identity.

Ciller's coalition ended as a result of the 1997 intervention of the Security Council to the government that some scholars refer to as the "soft coup" (Monshipouri, 2009:161), but it also changed the future of Turkish democracy. AKP blossomed as a reaction to this coup. As the former mayor of Istanbul who enjoyed extreme popularity among people for his outstanding achievements, Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the leader of AKP. He was also known as the loyal right arm of Erbakan's. Understanding and interpreting the status quo very intelligently, Erdogan and his colleagues not only differentiated but also distanced themselves from the Virtue Party (the successor of Welfare Party) and aimed to consolidate Turkey's Right under AKP's umbrella, very much like Ozal did in the 1980s.

While not repudiating their conservative and religious past, AKP came to power through democratic electoral process and attempted to successfully reconcile Islam with democracy, the rule of law, and economic development. As Mohamed Ayoob (June, 2011) puts it "the party has moved quite a distance away from its roots and repackaged itself as a conservative democratic formation akin in spirit to the Christian Democrats of Europe," but their center-right political position managed to capture more support from the people. Furthermore, they have just been reelected for a third term as the majority party in June 2011 elections. This political consolidation of right wing party voters in Turkey ranging from the fundamentalist Islamist sect to liberal conservatives not only engendered political stability, but also altered Turkey's own perception of its position in the region and globally.

INTEGRATION WITH BOTH THE EAST AND THE WEST

Turkey's geographic place on the world map as the bridge between the East and the West has also been prominent in the scholarly literature as a cultural and political bridge. As such, Turkey has also been trying to define its Eurasian identity as one that did not just connect but also represented both sides, though not as successfully. Relying upon its Ottoman heritage, Turkey possesses some amount of affinity with most of its surrounding countries. Whether through religious or ethno-linguistic connections, Turkish presence in the former Ottoman lands is still felt robustly today.

Under the new AKP policy and especially the Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's leadership, Turkish foreign policy adopted a new, embracive policy toward the neighboring countries. Davutoglu promotes a "zero-problems with the neighbors" policy that has been very successful. He also favors a multi-dimensional policy that finds its foundation on establishing complimentary rather than competitive partnerships with major powers. That means Turkey could and should belong to both the West and the East; it does not have to choose between the two (Davutoglu, 2010).

Davutoglu also believes that integrating domestic political accomplishments into the foreign policy vision is indispensable, but he also contends that foreign policy activism and self-confidence need to penetrate back into the domestic political scene as a result (Davutoglu, 2010). His new wave of peaceful relationships with the neighboring countries not only produced stupendous economic opportunities for Turkey but also created a sense of security among Turks who can now focus more on their internal development. Nowadays, Turkey abandons and debunks its paranoid, defensive politics arising from the former Turkish perception of being under the

threat of its inimical neighbors. Turkey suffered a psychological threat from the Caucasus to the Balkans in the past that prevented it from establishing more pragmatic foreign policies in the past (Davutoglu, 2001:56), but it is overcoming this challenge today.

Establishing better relations with the neighbors adds another dimension to the current Turkish identity too. This coming to terms with the former Ottoman/Turkish identity that goes beyond a secular, Kemalist, Western oriented one to embracing its Eurasian and Islamic identity has been welcomed by many within Turkey. Although from an AKP skeptical angle, it is still early days to draw any conclusions on whether Turkey will be able to remain without any interruption a secular but also Islamic-leaning democracy, this new Turkish persona seems to be overwhelmingly supported by the Turkish public and very well functioning as a healthy democratic system.

THE RISE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN TURKEY

A sanguine and functioning civil society establishes favorable conditions for the development of democracy in a nation and, additionally, the existence of democracy improves a country's development potential (Entelis, 2004:60). During the political consolidation period, Turkey has experienced a positive momentum toward democratization and it is partly because of its success in cultivating its civil society. In a country where civil society had not developed appropriately because of the negative impact of the consistent political havoc, recurring coups and the power of the military, Turkey has had to improve this record on the path to the EU membership. Since Turkey's recognition as a candidate country in 1999 and with the opening of the EU accession negotiations in 2005,

civil society's involvement in EU-Turkey relations has significantly intensified.

Following a generous €8 million budget provided by the EU to Turkey for civil society development between 1996 and 1999, a second program that delivered another €3.4 million to Turkey between 2002 and 2005 also promoted the establishment of an NGO support team as well as implementation of revised and improved laws and regulations within Turkey. As an official candidate, Turkey also became eligible for a variety of thematic, community, regional and country specific pre-accession programs. A new program, Strengthening Civil Society, in the EU pre-accession process was launched in 2006 with a budget of €10.5 million (Ozdemir, 2007:10-12).

The AKP government also bolstered this development through the legislative efficiency in the parliament. While the EU offered guidance, finances and strict scrutiny, Turkey also buttressed these opportunities with quick responses through adjustments in laws to meet the EU criteria. When the EU opened the membership negotiation process with Turkey, to enhance the civil society dialogue, Turkish government and the EU devoted a further €29.5 million in 2006 pre-accession assistance to this initiative. The launch of this program in 2007 signified continuous support to a hundred civic EU-Turkey cooperation projects among youth organizations, universities, municipalities, and professional organizations (Ozdemir, 2007:11-13). The EU integration process has fostered a thorough cooperation among the Turkish and EU counterparts from the trade unions and chambers of commerce to universities and NGOs. It is fair to conclude, therefore, that the EU's impact on Turkey is beyond economic development. Unlike the case of Iran, the EU acts as a

normative and supportive power on Turkey to support its process of democratic and economic development.

Besides the direct involvement, one expert argues that Turkey's democratization experience has also benefited from the demonstrative effects of the EU. The changes occurring in Eastern and Central Europe affected Turkey positively (Kirisci, 2011:36). As Samuel Huntington (1991:105) also contends, the most powerful demonstrative effects are regional ones. Turkey's geographic location and its political relationship with the recently democratizing post-communist nations also abolished a major threat to the Turkish security which in turn decreased the power of military and supported the democratization process.

TURKISH MILITARY'S RETREAT FROM POLITICS

Turkish military's deep involvement in the nation's domestic politics is well known. For instance, they publicly opposed President Gul's candidacy in 2007, and they have a track record of coups, threats, public warnings, and on and off the record briefings designed to intimidate, influence or arouse elected politicians, media, and public opinion. (Jenkins 2001; Park 2008:57). September 2010 referendum finally provided AKP an opportunity to democratically limit the power of the military and boost civilian power in governance of the country. The Ergenekon Case, which is still proceeding, profoundly shook the country and the military alike a few years ago. The former head of Turkey's armed forces, General Ilker Basbug, recently was arrested (December 2011) and may be tried in the Supreme Court if he is charged with plotting to overthrow the government. AKP government's relentless attempts to elucidate the "deep state" with the

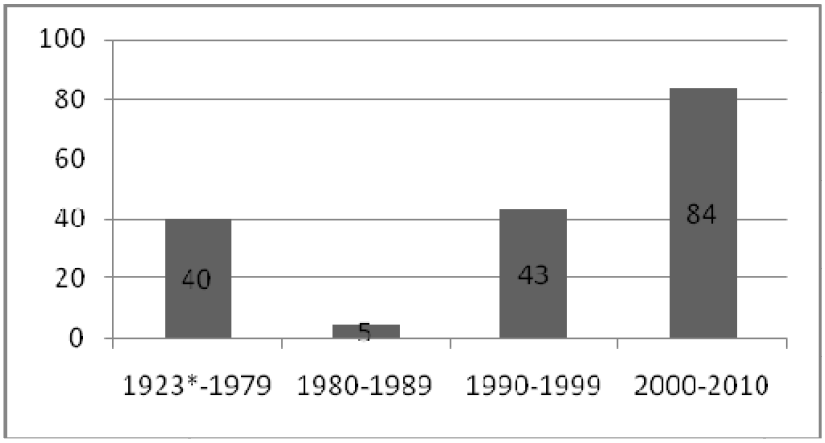
intention of dampening the power of military amplified its popularity among the public. While there has been an ongoing confrontation between the AKP and the military that went as far as a serious threat to shut down the party, AKP and Turkish political system remained true to its democratic principles.

ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

In addition to AKP's political stability and success in harnessing a new politics that is inclusive of Islamic identity in Turkey, the country's economy has also grown tremendously. Turkey's GDP per capita increased from $2773 in 1995 to $10,745 in 2008 while its overall trade also increased from $57.3 billion to $333.9 in 2008 (Turkish Statistical Institute and World Bank referenced in Kirisci, 2010:3). Moreover, during AKP's tenure exports have quadrupled, and inflation has decreased from as high as 37% to between 5% and 8%. Turkey has the 17th largest economy in the world, and Goldman Sachs predicts—if current trends continue—it will break into the top 10 by 2050 (Foroohar, 2011:38).

The momentum that AKP attained in economic success also reflected itself in various other developments in the country that impact numerous aspects of the society. More specifically, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of new higher education institutions. Today, every one of Turkey's eighty-one cities hosts at least one university. Figure 1 exhibits the growth in the number of universities in Turkey.

Figure 1. The Number of New Universities Opened by Time Intervals.



Source: Turkish Ministry of Education (http://yogm.meb.gov.tr/turkuniv_yay%C4%B1n.htm)

*Some universities date back to Ottoman Empire but they were either renamed or improved since the foundation of the new republic in 1923.

Between 1990 and 2010, 127 new universities were opened in comparison to the already existing 45. Although the education quality of these institutions vary greatly, more students in an extremely young population find an opportunity to get exposed to the university environment where they not only focus on their academic development, but also learn how to be proactive participants of their society in a modern, secular and democratic establishment. Turkey is no stranger to the prominence of universities and student movements in its political realm; for instance, the anarchy and confrontation among left and right wing students in the 1970s had eventually ended with a coup in 1980. It could thus be argued that the increase in the number of universities in Turkey plays an active role in the transformation of the society toward a more democratic one.

Likewise, the access to information and communication technologies significantly improved the integration of the society with

the outside world. Today, nearly 35 million people in Turkey have Internet access that constitutes 45% of the population (Internet World Stats Usage and Population Statistics, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/tr.htm> last accessed on July 28, 2011). The number of Turkish Facebook users reached almost 19 million and Turkey leads the chart in Europe (insidefacebook.com, last accessed July 28, 2011). Turks embrace the usage of social media and enjoy the freedom of communicating in the cyberspace. As the numbers suggest, despite the large sized rural population, Internet has permeated Turkey and its impact in developing civil society and providing instant knowledge definitely has an effect on Turkey's transformation within the global context. A comparison between Iran and Turkey in terms of access to social media is helpful (see Table 1)

Table 1. Access to Information and Communication Technology

		Telephones	Internet	
Population covered by		Users	Personal Computers	
mobile phone network		(per 100 people)	(per 100 people)	
2008		2008	2006-2008	
Human Development Index Rank (and other countries)				
70	Iran	95	32.0	10.4
83	Turkey	100	34.4	

Source: *Human Development Report 2010*, United Nations Development Program, New York: UNDP, 2010, pp. 212.

As far as being integrated into the global economy, Turkey's open door policy welcomes not only foreign direct investment but also people from Turkic, Muslim and former Ottoman regions as well as millions of tourists who visit Turkey every year. For instance, during the AKP tenure bilateral removal of visas and travel restrictions between Turkey and many other countries, such as Russia, Serbia, and Syria, enabled Turks to freely travel to any non-EU Balkan country, as well as to Russia and surrounding Middle Eastern neighbors. Turkish

citizens used to experience major difficulties—businessman and tourists alike—in their travel to other countries because of Visa restrictions. Such a cultural opening to the outside world also allows Turkish citizens to observe, experience, and compare other countries to theirs. The reflexivity in the Turkish opening in a globalized world, meaning bringing the outside world in, absolutely impacts what the Turkish people would or would not like to experience in their own country based on their observations during their interactions with the people of foreign countries.

ROADBLOCKS AND CHALLENGES

Although many of these great developments have been taking place, some democratic shortcomings have also been happening in Turkey. For instance, during AKP's tenure, there have been serious violations of press freedom. Reporters Without Borders illustrate Turkey's performance in press freedom index as it is represented in Table 2. AKP's intolerance toward certain groups of dissent resulted in shutting down one of the major newspapers of the country, Sabah, in 2008 (Thomson, *Washington Times*, March 2010). Also during the AKP tenure, YouTube has been banned in Turkey for long periods of time and some cases of Internet censorship have been reported. Similar repressive acts are not new to Turkey, but if the democratization trend is a viable one, Turkey needs to resolve such issues urgently and uphold democratic standards in press freedom.

Table 2. Press Freedom Index Rankings for Turkey

	Press Freedom Index Rank	Grade
Press Freedom Index Rank	a scale [0-100]	"0" being absolute press freedom on
2002 (pre-AKP)	99	33.50
2010 (under AKP)	138	49.25

Source: *Reporters Without Borders,* June 2011 (en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_report_turkey_2011_en.pdf, accessed July 26,2011)

Gender gap in Turkey is another topic that provides contradicting data to democratization process. As Table 3 below displays, Turkey's rank has been on the decline in this study as well. According to the gender gap index, Turkey has dropped sixty-nine spots in the global rank, showing worsening conditions for women in the nation. In a more democratic country, women's representation in political arena and work place should have been on the rise, particularly for a country that has given the right to vote and get elected to its women in 1930. What is even more interesting is that the trend in the female representation in the parliament "Meclis" is very positive. While in 2002, the number of women deputies was 4.4%, their number more than doubled to 9.1% in 2007 elections, and the June 2011 elections introduced a record of 78 women in parliament that make up 14% of the 550 deputies (*Hurriyet Daily News*, July 2011).

Table 3. The Global Gender Gap Index rankings 2004-2010.

	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2004
Global Gender Gap Index Rank followed by the change with respect to previous year						
Turkey	126	129	123	121	105	57
Change	+3	-6	-2	-16	-48	n/a
Iran	123	128	116	118	108	n/a
Change	+5	-12	+2	-10	n/a	n/a

Source: *World Economic Forum*: www.weforum.org (last accessed July 28/2011).

It is hard to escape the conclusion that Turkey's democratization process is also as whimsical as how the West perceives its foreign policy. While there are some serious changes and developments in the nation, some growing pains overshadow the positive developments and raise questions of maturity regarding the transformations. Turkey's complicated political system and Eurasian identity still bring about various challenges that Turks need to meet in the years to come.

TRENDS AND TRANSFORMATION

A comparative look at Iran and Turkey shows remarkable similarities in the general indicators of human development index (HDI) and future trends (see Table 4).

Table 4. Human Development Index and Its Components

HDI Rank	Life expectancy at birth	Mean years of schooling	Expected years of schooling	Gross National Income GINI per capita
	(years)	(years)	(years)	(PPP 2008 $)
	2010	2010	2010	2010
70 Iran	71.9	7.2	14.0	11,764
83 Turkey	72.2	6.5	11.8	13,359

Source: *Human Development Report 2010*, United Nations Development Program, New York: UNDP, 2010, pp. 144.

Iran's young (youthful) age structure merits particular attention. Almost seventy percent of Iranians are below the age of thirty and majority of this population is gravitating toward cities over time (see Table 5). The Islamic Republic that had initially endorsed large families in the earlier years of revolution realized that this would overburden the country's economy and welfare programs. The state officials chose to reverse the course by promoting family planning programs. Iranian youth have to constantly deal with a number of

dualities and contradictions, none more significant than the imposed official ideology versus the pragmatic, day-to-day, and less conformist social realities.

There are also a number of conflicting ages of adulthood: the official puberty age is 13 years old for girls and 15 years for boys. The voting age for both sexes is 15, and the legal age for getting a driver's license, opening a bank account, getting a passport, and working is 18 (Maghazei, 2003:28). The results in Table 5 reveal remarkably similar demographic trends and patterns of rural-to-urban migration in both countries.

Table 5. Demographic Trends

Population

Total				Average Annual Growth		Urban	
(millions)				(0%)		(% of total)	
Human Development Index Rank (from very high to low to other countries)							
	1990	2010	2030	1990-1995	2010-2015	1990	2010
Iran	56.7	75.1	89.9	1.8	1.1	56.3	70.8
Turkey	56.1	75.7	90.4	1.7	1.1	59.2	69.7

Source: *Human Development Report 2010*, United Nations Development Program, New York: UNDP, 2010, pp. 185.

STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

While Iran lacks a comprehensive national policy about coming to grips with its people's changing political culture, Turkey's leaders, especially those associated with AKP, have successfully managed a rebirth of Islamic modernism capable of reconciling Islamic identity with democratic aspirations of its people. It is worth noting that Turkey has done so within the context of a secular constitution while maintaining the integrity of its Islamic cultural heritage and identity.

Turkey's liberal Islam is steering a course between its secular critics and Muslim extremists.

The real question is: has Turkey become a working example of Muslim democracy? It is still too early to draw emphatic conclusions regarding the maturity and sustainability of Turkish democracy. For instance, AKP's agenda that employs a modern Islamic political discourse seems to have liberated the oppressed religious community in Turkey, a community which is likely to embrace a much touted religious and cultural heritage of the Ottoman times. However well deserved this aspiration may be, if this group becomes the majority—a prospect not too unrealistic at this point—and assumes an ultra-nationalistic position, this could just as well pose real threats to the basic freedoms cherished by secular parties and groups. Moreover, the AKP's reputation has been undermined by numerous accusations of authoritarianism made by some prominent ethnic groups such as the Kurds and the Alawis. We may witness some interruptions in Turkey's democratization process in coming years.

That said, trust in government is much higher in Turkey than in Iran in large part because AKP's strong performance in industrial growth, job creating investment, and capacity building (economic development and improving health care and education), and housing sector. No sovereign state can escape changes in economic programs, leadership, and ideas if it wishes to meet the public's expectations. Performance has increasingly become a principal criterion used to judge a government's authority and legitimacy (James Rosenau is quoted in Cusimano Love, 2011: 366-372). By the same token, human rights performance should be viewed as a function of improved socioeconomic and political conditions. Citizen's support for democratic governments, as experts remind us, is ultimately a function

of better performance (Chu, et.al, 2009:150).

In some respects, AKP has become more nationalist than religious in its political orientations. Perhaps one noticeable advantage in Turkey has always been the centralization of power at the top—either under civilian regimes with a strong military establishment in the background or under a democratic system with civilian leaders at the helm. The latter has been the case in Turkey since 2002 when the AKP rose to power. By contrast, in Iran since the post-Khomeini era, the pyramid of power has crumbled, as the country's ruling elite has been locked in an increasingly intense power struggle over whether the nation should move in the direction of strengthening nationalistic goals or keeping its core Islamic-ideological orientation intact. This power struggle in Iran at a time when the region is undergoing sweeping changes is likely to have negative consequences for the Islamic Republic and Iran's regional strategies more generally. Today, Iran still exemplifies Islamism, while Turkey represents a new Islamist-secularist hybrid; thus, gauging the relative success of each country can help us predict which regime will eventually come to prevail. .

Another contrasting point between the two countries relates to the way in which civil-military relations have been regulated. In Turkey, Prime Minister Erdogan has sought to reduce the power of the military and assert a reasonable modicum of civilian control over the military—even as that tactical maneuver is still far from complete. Having been elected for the third term in office in the past nine years with 50 percent of vote, the AKP's position is increasingly consolidated. There are still divisions among the elite in Turkey, but even then opposition is no longer directed against AKP solely on ideological grounds, as was the case in the previous elections,

describing the AKP as an Islamist party. The opposition to the AKP is largely expressed in socioeconomic and political terms, as they relate to internal economy, foreign policy, and the Kurdish question. Today, the AKP rides on the wave of an even greater democratic legitimacy and public approval, giving Prime Minister Erdogan a secure base and firm anchorage for leading the Turkey. It is more difficult now than in the past to deny his "right" to rule the country until the next elections (Dagi, 2011).

Iran's clerical establishment, by contrast, has forged an alliance with the Revolutionary Guards to limit Ahmadinejad's presidential powers, while ratcheting up further pressure on him in an attempt to defang his presumably hidden agenda to undermine the clerical rule. The result has been the increasing influence of the Revolutionary Guards within the Iranian power structure, raising the specter of "praetorian corporatism" in the country (Ayoob, 2011:64).

The AKP's Islamic roots notwithstanding, its ruling style and strategic outlook are much more pragmatic than Iran. It is important to bear in mind, however, that Iran's economy, largely based on the export of oil and gas, has been severely hampered by U.S. led sanctions imposed upon it by the United Nations. These sanctions, although not crippling Iran's economy completely, have considerably constrained Iran's possibilities as a dominant regional player. Iran needs to build a propitious social and economic environment to boost its vast potential capacities. To better use the country's economic potential, Iran must not only expand its private sector but also its civil society. "Creative public-private partnerships," as experts remind us, "are the wave of the future in solving global problems." (Cusimano Love, 2011:366).

To fully implement economic reform in the country, Iran needs to

improve women's status in the economy. Political openness and sustainable efforts aimed at carrying out reform and restructuring—key to any viable democratizing process—will have positive long-term effects on the economy, preventing further brain drain, the loss of management skills, capital flight, corruption, and nepotism. Iran needs to ensure basic rights and democratic principles as a necessary condition for undertaking socioeconomic reform. While Iran has relied heavily on oil, Turkey has depended upon its industry and tourism. In the past two decades, Turkey has successfully curbed inflation, reducing it from 80 percent to 10 percent, while during the same period Iran has had to grapple with inflation rate of nearly 25 percent on average. While in the past, depreciation of Turkish Lira was almost 100 percent per year, they have now reduced it to less than 10 percent per year (Gokoluk, 2012). Iran's Rial depreciation, by contrast, hovers around 50 percent per year. Not relying on natural resources, Turkey diversifies its trade partnerships better too. Turkey's traditional commercial bonds with Europe are eroding while its trade links with the non-European world flourish. In 1999, for instance, the EU accounted for over 56% of Turkish trade. In 2011, this number went down to 41%, while the share of members of the Organization of Islamic Countries in Turkish trade climbed from twelve percent to twenty percent in the same period. (Cagaptay, 2011).

In the future, Iran will do well if its leaders can defuse the tensions around its nuclear program, using the newly emerging Turko-Persian relations to open diplomatic channels of communication with the West more generally and the United States more specifically. Regionally, Iran and Turkey pursue seemingly competing interests in the Caucuses, as Iran's relations with Armenia appear normal while tensions exist between Iran and Azarbaijan. Internally, the deep-seated

ethnic and political tensions between Tehran and the Azeri provinces are unlikely to disappear anytime soon. By contrast, *Turkey-Armenia relations* have long been *strained* by a number of historical-political issues, including *Turkish* dispute of the Armenian Genocide during World War I. Turkey continues to have close relations with Azarbaijan.

In the last analysis, Iran's foreign relations, both regionally and internationally, are the key to its economic success. Absent any improvements in Iran's relations with the West, the issues of civil society, economic liberalization, and democratization will relegate to lower priorities. The root-causes of the problems Iran encounters are more political than economic or cultural. The findings of this study support the proposition that economics is never separated from politics. The lesson for Iran is imperatively evident: improved relations with the West will also promote foreign direct investment and economic growth, while allowing for further integration into the global economy. ❖

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