Islam, Models and the Middle East: The New Balance of Power following the Arab Spring[1]

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Abstract

The Arab Spring has created a fertile ground for the competition of different models (Turkish, Iranian and Saudi) and for a new balance of power in the Middle East and North Africa. These three models, based on three distinct styles of politics, go hand in hand with competing particular politics of Islam. Their search for a new order in the region synthesises covert and overt claims for regional leadership, national interests and foreign policy priorities. This article argues that the new emerging regional order will be established on either a theo-political understanding, in other words on securitisation and alliances based on sectarian polarisation which will lead to more interference from non-regional actors, or on a gradual reform process of economic integration and diplomatic compromise. In the first case, biases and negative perceptions will be deepened in reference to history and to differences in religious interpretation, and will result in conflict, animosity and outside interference. In the second case, there will be a chance to establish a cooperative regional, non-sectarian perspective accompanied by a critical, but not radical, attitude towards the West.

Key Words

Model, Islam, balance of power, Middle East, theo-political, New Sunnism, Arab Spring, Salafi, Shia, Wahhabi.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to discuss the changing balance of power in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region following the Arab Spring by focusing on the foreign policies of the four leading states- Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt- and their political and religious models. The main emphasis will be the way in which how these four countries use their models as vehicles to compete for supremacy in a new regional order. Therefore, the problem will not be dealing with what model people should/would follow but how these models have been used and enhanced through various soft and hard power instruments. We discuss the three models in relation to each other through their relationship to US (the global other) and Israel (the regional other) in shaping the potential fourth model of the emerging Egypt.

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In reality, these three models are based on three distinct styles of politics. These three models go hand in hand with three different peculiar politics of religion. The Iranian model legitimises itself as against the US, Israel, imperialism and the West through an "axis of resistance". It aims for a radical change in the regional status quo that was established, yet pursues pragmatic politics when necessary. As a tool for legitimacy, Iran follows a polarising and sectarian (Shi'ism) theo-political[2] policy. In contrast, Saudi Arabia legitimises its own regional vision by formulating itself as Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Sunnism and Islam, opposing reforms and envisions an authoritarian model in favour of the status quo. This model follows a polarising and sectarian (Sunni) theo-political policy. While Saudi Arabia is facing a more radical Salafist (right-wing) opposition, the Iranian regime is up against a more moderate and liberal (left-wing) opposition.[3] Thus, these two theo-political models increase the potential for conflict in the region by inviting foreign powers to intervene in regional politics.

The third model, the Turkish model, aims for economic integration and is based on Turkey's increasing popularity due to its economic success and foreign policy performance. This model prefers the gradual transformation of the *status quo* through solutions coming from compromise. Instead of a theo-political stance that emphasises polarisation and sectarianism, this model introduces a political theology based on pluralism.

> In the search for regional hegemony there is need for transnational institutions, religious rhetoric and practices that can reach non-governmental actors outside of national borders.

These three models have been attempting to influence a potential fourth model, the Egyptian model. It is still unclear what the Egyptian model will look like; however, this model will be deeply influential in building a new regional order. From the Tahrir effect[4] on other countries to Morsi's election to presidency and the coup d'état against him on 3 July 2013, whatever happens in Egypt will affect other countries in the region.[5] Fred Dallmayr sees the Egyptian Tahrir revolution as Islam's response to Western modernity and that it is a democratic alternative to the secular Kemalist revolution and Iranian Islamic reform.[6] Saudi Arabia's reaction and Israel's securitised response to the Egyptian model, the US's democracy promotion agenda and its will to protect

its authoritarian allies in the region, will affect the future of this transformation.

Discussion of the Models and Regional Powers in the Search for Order in the Middle East

The Arab Spring forced all the regional powers in the Middle East to manage this revolution and to try to find a new Middle Eastern order. Even if Turkey's claim of it forging a new order is more commonly known, both Iran's and Saudi Arabia's search for a new order goes farther back than Turkey's claim. Their search for a new order synthesises covert and overt claims to regional leadership, national interests and foreign policy priorities. The parameters that define this competition to influence the new emerging order are not merely the strategic; rather there are competing ideologies and visions for the future of the region. In other words, the "model discussion" is a power projection opportunity related to differing regional demands and visions of the various countries on how the new emerging regional order should be.

Therefore, any claim to be a "model" combines strategic goals, national interests, security concerns and ideological visions. In the search for regional hegemony there is need for transnational institutions, religious rhetoric and practices that can reach non-governmental actors outside of national borders. The countries who aspire to be models must have the determination to mobilise their resources to encourage their non-governmental organisations to be active outside of their national borders. Despite this, these countries do not push their "model" on others to be readily imitated by others. Except for Iran shortly after the 1979 Revolution, none of them have claimed to provide a universal model to the region or the Islamic world.

In the model debate, different interpretations of Islam and its mobilisation are vital. The regional countries mobilise their own versions of Islam to strengthen their soft power and for legitimacy purposes.[7] Saudi Arabia and Iran are both mobilising the ulama for this cause, and are openly making theo-political claims. The greatest advantage for these two countries is the consensus on the strategic vision among political and state elites. Having the Muslim Brotherhood excluded from the political life, Egypt seems to lose the significance of its theo-political claims. However, it would continue to become theo-politically influential in its search for influence in the regional power struggle since it had theo-political claims even during the Mubarak era as a result

of al Azhar University.[8] While in the Egyptian case, both the recent coup d'état and the influence of external powers will limit these claims, in the Turkish case, political culture, intra-elite problems and internal power balance will limit theo-political claims. In spite of these limitations, the JDP's foreign policy within the limits of secular nation-state seems to protect the Islamic interests of regional peoples, and strengthens the Religious Affairs Directorate. Still, after the Arab Spring, the alternative religion-politics relationship models and theo-political policies may force Turkey to recalibrate the role of religion in her policies. If Egypt comes out successful from its current turmoil, a pluralistic and democratic "new Sunnism" might arise as a response to Shi'ism and Wahhabism in the long run. That said, however they became integral part of state policies, Shi'ism, Sunnism or Wahhabism cannot be seen as all-inclusive (monolithic) religious movements. Each represents a particular Islamic understanding, and all are pluralist and historically and politically founded positions. Therefore, the new struggle for an emerging regional order will not be between the Islamic ummah and Western colonists or Israel, but whether Islam will be interpreted in a theo-political or political theological position. While Iran is an unchallenged theo-political

representative of Shi'ism, Wahhabism, which is just another version of Sunnism, will not remain unchallenged. The "new Sunni" arguments and positions that may spring from normalisation of Egypt and transformation of Turkey's religion-politics experience will be potential challenges to Wahhabism and Shi'ism.

The limits of regional models and new nationalism

It is clear that none of the competing countries can solidify values that could create consent throughout the region. The exclusionary nature of Shi'ism and Wahhabism does not allow them to forge an inclusive consensus that is based on political participation of minority groups and women's rights for the entire region. In discussing the idea of "model", it is not true to assume that a model should be absolute and flawless but rather it should be taken as experience sharing.

Following the Arab Spring, a new pragmatic nationalism that blends Islam with Arabism is rising.[9] These new versions of nationalism are intertwined with the claims that there is need for a new order established through regional leadership. In the different regional leadership models, Iran, Turkey and even Egypt claim that they are trying to find regional solutions to the problems

of the region while rejecting external interference.[10] While Iran formulates regional solution that would lead to less influence from the US and other Western actors, Turkey attempts to balance the influence of Iran's soft and hard power policies to ease the disturbances felt by Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries. Iran's influence and its vocal support for Palestinians were balanced by Turkey after the 2009 Davos incident. It is quite likely that Egypt would have changed its policy towards Israel and would be more critical due to its democratic responsiveness to the demands of its people if President Morsi had not been toppled by the Egyptian military.

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Of the regional powers in the position of model countries, the first and undoubtedly the most radical one is Iran.

The Iranian Model: Shia Politics between Radical Change and the *Status Quo*

The 1979 Iranian Revolution not only inspired Islamist movements against the West and the US, but it also played a major role in spreading the idea of revolution and its critique of Israel. Even though Iran was unsuccessful in exporting the Islamic state model, it influenced other Islamist movements who came to see Sharia as the main source of the state.[11]

Whether it is right or wrong, the term "Shia Crescent" has signified a growing concern about Iran's policies in the region. To be more precise, after the US invasion of Iraq, Iran's increasing power projection in the region has increased its area of influence through its support for the pro-Iranian Shia in Iraq, the Shi'ite opposition in Bahrain and the increased activity of the Shi'ite population in western Saudi Arabia,[12] through the mobilisation of the Zaydis of Yemen[13] against the Saudi-backed Yemeni government, and the conversion of Alawites to Shi'ism in Syria.

With Iranian support for the Shi'ite Hazara people in Afghanistan, and of course Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, the picture has become even clearer.

Shia politics as a theo-political instrument

The idea of a Shia awakening after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 links three phenomena: the Shia majority taking power in Iraq, Iran's rise as a regional power, and Shia groups gaining power in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Pakistan. With the Shia awakening, the various Shia groups in the Middle East have become braver about taking power and the religious and cultural interaction among them is increasing. Two dimensions of the foundation of this reawakening can be determined: Iran's regional policies based on Shi'ism, and the partially integrated and partially competing status of Shia politics in Iraq. Even though Shi'ism may seem at a disadvantage because of its smaller population, it actually has a more advantageous position than Sunnism when it comes to having a transnational network. Unlike Sunnis, the fact that Shia Muslims must form their religious beliefs by imitating a clergyman (*marja'al-taqlid*) naturally creates a transnational religious network. In the Sunni world, there is the impression that the *vilayat al-faqih* doctrine created by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini directs all Shia to follow the Iranian religious leadership over their own religious leaders and that their loyalty is to Qom in Iran. King Abdullah II of Jordan and former President Mubarak of Egypt expressed this impression by stating that the Shia are untrustworthy citizens.[14] The "Shia Crescent" theory is based on the Shia taking power in Iraq, and Iran's growing influence on Shia population in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.[15] We argue that the idea of a Shia Crescent is the result of polarising sectarian rhetoric in the region. That being said, Iran's manipulation of Shia Islam and of its ability to mobilise the Shi'ite populations for its national interests creates the basis for Iran's soft power and its vision of Shi'ism as a theo-political instrument.

It should be noted that Shi'ism has been successfully used by Iran in two ways. Historically, Shi'ism provided a strong foundation for Iran to transcend specific national interests and concerns. This sectarian identity, which was even manifested in the Shah's era, has continued after the Iranian Revolution to support Iranian policies, and has provided an ideological legitimacy beyond national borders. Made up of Islamist and nationalist elements, this Shia identity criticises Arab nationalisms or Pan-Arabism. The decline in the legitimacy of the secular Baath regimes was deepened with the downfall of the Saddam regime and has been completed with the Arab Spring. In

this respect, Khamenei was able to find an accommodating political scene after 2003 and 2011, which Khomeini was not able to find after the Iranian Revolution.

The Shia reawakening in a different way made Iranians uncomfortable as some in Iran started following Ayatollah Sistani and paying alms to Sistani's representative in Qom, which indicates that there will be competition for religious leadership within Shi'ism.[16] In other words, it is inaccurate to say that the Iranian religious leadership is uncontested in gaining the loyalty of the Shia population. This all started after Najaf once again being a religious centre for the Arab Shia after the 2003 Iraqi invasion. This may lead to a competition between Ayatollah Sistani's *vilayet al ummah* theory[17] and Ayatollah Khomeini's *vilayat al-faqih* theory. However, because of the Syrian crisis, it is difficult to see whether this would lead to a differentiation.

Iran has built its regional alliances by promoting itself as an axis of resistance. To transcend the sectarian limits, Iran has emphasised the Palestinian problem. This has also allowed it to establish a transnational policy. In this sense, Israel's continuing aggressive and offensive policies helps Iran to continue its regional alliance.[18] The second component of Iran's foreign policy is having nuclear technology that includes enriching uranium. Iran sees its nuclear programme as a critical element to increase internal national solidarity, as well as to bolster its claim that it is setting up a new order in the region.[19]

The Arab Spring and the limits of the Iranian model

In the earlier stages of the Arab Spring, Iran supported the protest movements. For Iran, the protests were the reaction of Muslim peoples against "the Western-supported secular dictators". In addition, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, like the Arab revolutions, was realised through non-violent protests, boycotts and civil unrest. As a result, the Iranian administration argued that these revolutions were influenced by the Iranian Revolution and that the "great awakening" promised by Khomeini was taking place.[20] Thus, it was thought that the increasing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and similar Islamic movements could support the Islamic politics represented by Iran. Pro-reform Iranian authors also believe that the regional reform movements first began with Khatami's election to presidency in 1997 and that if this process had not been interrupted, Iran would have been in a more influential position than Turkey.[21]

On the other hand, Iran's interpretation of the regional revolutions as "anti-Western" was aimed towards its internal politics. The fact that a youth movement that emphasises freedom, democracy and income distribution overlaps with the Iranian opposition is seen as a handicap for Iran. It should be remembered that demonstrations by the opposition to express solidarity with the Tunisian people in February 2011 were harshly put down. This shows the limits of the Iranian model.

To overcome sectarian limitations, Iran's field of hegemonic rhetoric in the Middle East has always been constructed around the notion of "anti-imperialism". Contrary to many analyses, the strategic alliance between Syria and Iran has been in fact around this notion and not on sectarian bonds.[22] Using anti-imperialist rhetoric, Iran, which has been able to form alliances with both the Alawites and the Sunni revisionist powers, has attempted to define itself as the leader of the resistance bloc, and has somewhat been successful. However, one of the results of the Arab Spring is that it has revealed that Iran's "anti-imperialism" rhetoric is unable to go beyond sectarian limitations as Iran changed this attitude when faced with the risk of losing its most important ally, Syria.[23] Thus, Iran's initial excitement is now less out of principle and more fragmented and

contextual. Iran, too, now gives emphasis to the difference between the interests of its allies and the others, and has almost completely given up an approach based on principles.

> As the Libyan, Syrian, Yemeni, and Bahraini examples show us, it will not be easy to eliminate the authoritarian regimes in the region despite the Arab Spring and even they can reproduce themselves under the cloak of "democratic" military intervention as in the Egyptian case.

The weakest side of the Iranian model is its counterproductive and reactionary political language and its political practice, which is founded on sectarian polarisation. In addition, when the daily secular choices and freedoms of this model are examined, the loss of legitimacy among its own people is thought provoking.

Syria has also created a serious legitimacy issue for Iran. Despite its Islamic foreign policy agenda, Iran's support for Arab nationalist and secular Baath regimes against the Islamists has turned almost all of the regional Islamist movements against it. This could possibly

erode Iran's potential to be a regional power and result in the decrease of its area of political influence.[24] For political movements who found their rhetoric on democratisation, participation and income distribution, the Iranian model is not appealing.

The Iranian model is hard-power centred and has been influential on Shia populations and anti-US/Israel groups to secure material resources. The soft power element of this model is unable to go beyond the Shia and some non-Sunni groups of the region.

The most appealing side of the Iranian model is undoubtedly its view of the US as an external global power who constantly and cruelly interferes in the region, and its exclusion of Israel as an actor that was implanted in the region by Western powers. Iran's anti-US and Israel discourse delegitimises the pro-American countries in the region and Saudi Arabia's authoritarian model. Iran now looks as if it has abandoned the idea of a regional model based in the region itself in favour of its sectarian interests, and this has considerably limited its opportunity to be a distinctive model that begun with the revolution. Saudi Arabia, who represents a different style of politics and emphasises security, is situated directly opposite to this model.

The Saudi Arabian Model: A Monarchy Favouring the *Status Quo* and Wahhabism

Saudi Arabia's influence in the region has often been overlooked. With its support for various Salafist movements, its close alliance with the US and its leadership in the Gulf, and especially its formation of a "Sunni bloc"[25] against Iran, Saudi Arabia is one of the most important countries in the region. The fall of the Saddam regime in Iraq and the demise of the Mubarak regime in Egypt have decreased these countries' influence on the Arab world. The Saudi model represents a conservative Wahhabi authoritarian regime[26] as it cannot even accept the idea of a constitutional monarchy. In this respect, even though it is a pro-*status quo* model, it has a critical role in shaping the structure of the new order.[27] By providing asylum to the fallen leader of Tunisia, supporting Mubarak and the *coup d'état* in Egypt and sending Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) troops to Bahrain, this model has shown that it is a supporter of the regional *status quo*. However, when the new Arab revolts appeared in favour of Saudi Arabia in Libya, Syria, and partially in Yemen, even though they threatened the *status quo*, this model supported the forces of the Arab Spring. In another

way, Saudi Arabia represents a model that will act as a barrier to stop the waves of the Arab Spring from hitting the oil-rich Gulf monarchies.

Paradoxically, even though the Saudi model is the opposite of the Iranian model, its theo-political power works in a similar way in its sectarian direction and polarising nature. The Saudi Arabian monarchy, feeling surrounded and threatened by Iran, is trying to overcome the demands for democratisation and participation through social aid policies. While the US is trying to manage the regional transformation with an "orderly transition" approach, the Saudi model's refusal to reform itself solidifies its authoritarian side in the short run. However, this approach will lead to loss of its legitimacy in the longer term.[28] Despite this, the Saudi model, by utilising the "Iranian threat" to gain the "Sunni leadership", is following sectarian and polarising policies. The strength of the Saudi model is visible in the Gulf countries' policies of securitisation and authoritarianism. As the Libyan, Syrian, Yemeni, and Bahraini examples show us, it will not be easy to eliminate the authoritarian regimes in the region despite the Arab Spring and even they can reproduce themselves under the cloak of "democratic" military intervention as in the Egyptian case. In this respect, the Saudi model seems appealing- especially

to the leaders of rentier regimes even if it is not so favourable for the people.

The regional order and the transforming function of the US and the GCC

The GCC, central in shaping the regional order, exceeded its initial economic integration role and recently gained military functions. The new twofold mission of the GCC is to maintain internal security and protect the regional *status quo*. For this purpose, and led by Saudi Arabia, the GCC aims to protect the regional monarchies from radical movements and endeavours to guarantee stability in order to maintain the new economic structure in the Gulf, where the Gulf countries have recently been trying to plan their post-oil and natural gas economy and are increasingly becoming a geo-economic centre of finance.[29] The GCC initially regarded Saudi Arabia's basic role as the protector of the Gulf monarchies against the influence coming from Iran and Iraq.[30] Saudi Arabia, by refusing the US's call to meet with Bahraini opposition, instead opting to interfere militarily via the GCC, proves that Saudi Arabia is the guardian of the *status quo*, and it will even oppose the US's demands to fulfil this role.[31] Saudi aspiration to include Jordan and Morocco in the GCC indicates that

it intends to form an opposing balance against the Arab Spring. This strategy is legitimised through an anti-Iran discourse.[32]

Within this environment of rising sectarian polarisation in the region after the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia maintains its critical position in US strategy. In the GCC, the US is trying to balance the situation by not losing Saudi Arabia[33] yet keeping the Arab Spring alive. This formula will not only ease the Saudi family and save face, but will also stop Iran. The US, who wants to already start shaping the new order in the Middle East, would be agreeable to the GCC turning into a NATO-like security alliance against the rising Iranian threat.

Wahhabism and expansionist theo-politics

The strongest aspects of Saudi Arabia's model are Wahhabism's transnational connections, its sectarian legitimacy, financial strength and Western political and military support. The Saudi claim that they are pursuing a religious policy and are serving Islam has made it convenient to use the "true representation of Islam" rhetoric to present their political/strategic interests and goals, and to defend them in the media.[34] The Saudi claim of being the Custodian of

the Two Holy Mosques (moral politics: soft power) and large income from oil (realpolitik: hard power) not only makes it easier to apply a transnational policy, but also allows Saudi Arabia to challenge Iran, Hezbollah and al Qaeda in competition for the "authentic" version of Islam.[35]

> Saudi Arabia has not become a target country for democracy promotion as the current system ensures that oil will smoothly be transferred to the international markets, and also due to its distinguished role in protecting the status quo in the region will be preserved.

Despite opposing Wahhabi comments, the official Wahhabi community's support for Saudi foreign policy is critically vital for the survival of the regime. This support has allowed the Saudis to maintain its relations with US on the basis of mutual strategic/national interests.[36] The Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda example, on the other hand, has shown the extent to which the limits of Wahhabism can go. Despite all this, Saudi Arabia has not become a target country for democracy promotion as the current system ensures that oil will smoothly be transferred to the international markets,

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The limits of the Saudi model and the regional balance of power

The weakest side of this model is the impossibility of the reproduction of its strongest aspects i.e., realpolitik and moral politics. Due to its conservative and authoritarian limits, it is difficult for the Saudi model to be an alternative for the masses. The anti-participatory conservative attitude that manifests itself in the daily segregation against women for example does not have a perspective that can be maintained in the long run even if the high oil revenues are distributed like bribes. The participatory character of the Turkish model, and any eventual democratisation of Egypt, will challenge the Saudi model in the long term.

In the long run, in spite of the detrimental effects of the recent military intervention, the Tahrir revolution will put Egypt back at the centre of the Arab world. A potential Saudi-Egyptian competition over the regional order may also be a competition over who will win Egyptian Salafis, and this may sour the relations between the two countries.[37] In addition, the Brotherhood's extensive network in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, will make the competition harder for Saudi model.[38] All the predictions that the Salafis will remain loyal to the Saudis do not necessarily reflect the reality as the Salafi movement is not uniform and homogeneous and is instead socially heterogeneous and politically diverse. The Saudi model will continue to represent the pro-US, Sunni authoritarian political position in the region.

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On another level, Saudi support for Sunni groups first during the Afghan War in the 1980s against the Soviet Union and especially later in Iraq against Iran has turned it into a regional power. While empowering the sectarian political groups among the Sunnis in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia suffered a serious blow with the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. Bringing military possibilities to the table as well for the regional competition for power after Hariri's assassination, Saudi Arabia supported the Islamist and Sunni section of the opposition in Syria and aims to block Iran's growing clout in the region.

After the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia felt isolated as a result of the US's lack of support for Mubarak and Saleh, and attempted to diversify its relations with countries that may counter-balance the US, such as Pakistan and China. Saudi relations with China have been extended to the areas of the economy, energy and petro-chemicals.[39] However, with Pakistan, it has a military partnership, common sectarian policies and a strategic balancing act against Iran. Saudi policy proved counter-productive in Egypt where the absence of sectarian tension alienated mainstream Sunni groups from its model.

The Turkish Model: Increasing Self-confidence and the New Balance between the West and Islam

There has been a "Turkish model", which has spanned the 20th Century. that has aimed at portraying Turkey as a "new" modern and secular country or as a "source of inspiration" for modernising countries. However, the real focus behind the recent discussions has been the last 10 years when the JPD has governed the country. The following two examples show how the notion of "Turkey as a model country" has been played out. In the post- 9/11 era, US

President George W. Bush's "freedom agenda" presented Turkey as a symbol of moderate Islam and a potential model of democracy for the Middle East.[40] In a more recent example President Barack Obama pointed to Turkey as a model for the Islamists in moving to a democracy from the previous authoritarian Middle East regimes in after the Arab Spring.

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Had the model debate remained ideas for only US presidents, Turkey would not have been the object to such a debate. However, the Islamist political leaders of the transitioning countries in the Middle East, such as Rashid Ghannushi's Ennahda Movement in Tunisia or the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, have also openly expressed their intention to benefit from the Turkish experience to disassociate themselves from the likes of Iran and the Taliban.[41] On the other hand, seeing Turkey as a country that bridges democracy and Islam, under the JDP government the Turkish model appeals to diverse groups

in the region.[42] Thus, the reason Turkey is seen as a model is simultaneously both Kemalism and the JDP experience. With the new balance it has established between security, democratisation and economic development, and its new definition of national interests, the JDP represents an interesting experience. Another reason why Turkey is seen as a model is the gradual move towards civilian control over the military. In other words, now that the political elite decide on national security issues, it has become a very appealing example for countries like Tunisia and Egypt in their recent transitional period.

The Turkish model's appeal and paradox

The striking point about Turkey's model is its appeal to diverse political positions and agendas because there are multiple "Turkish models" for different actors. The first group, the overwhelming majority of the authoritarian secular elites, reads the Turkish model as a controlled modernisation through the supervision of a military bureaucracy to moderate and integrate Islamist actors into the political system. This group's understanding of Islam and modernity is contaminated by Eurocentric and Orientalist visions. According to them, the people of the region are not mature

enough to live in a democratic system. Therefore, until this maturation, military elites should oversee the transition.[43] These are the people who have attempted to contain the effects of the Arab Spring with a "counter-revolutionary" agenda.[44]

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The second group, predominantly Islamists, see Turkey as a model because of the transformations that have happened in Turkey in the last decade under the JDP rule. The real issue is that the JDP, a democratically elected government, has brought Islam and democracy together, integrated Islamists in politics, established the rule of law and civilian supremacy over military elites and brought about economic development.[45] What is more, Turkey's ability to criticise Israel[46] makes the Turkish model more appealing for Islamist movements. Turkey's ability to transform civilian-military relations is appealing as these actors have been struggling to transform the "neo-Mamluk"[47] administrations in which the military elites ruled and had

economic privileges. It is a natural choice for the Islamists who have joined politics only after the Baathist movements left the political scene.

The third group is the people who look at Turkey and see democratic transformation, lively economic development, a diverse political life that advocates for freedom and a pluralistic life style.[48] This group is interested in Turkey for its liberal agenda, yet this ironically shows both the appeal and the limitations of the Turkish experience. It is an attractive model to be inspired by, but if the Turkish model is seen as a model to be imposed on Egypt or Tunisia, all these political groups will accept only some of what they understand and reject the rest, and thus the model rhetoric will backfire. For example, Turkey's Kemalist and secularist political regime will be unacceptable to Islamist groups.[49] Even if one could claim that the transformation of the Islamic movement in Turkey can be an example to Islamic movements in the Middle East, Turkish secularism's "impoverishing sensitivity"[50] towards a public role of Islam may repel many.

The strength of the Turkish model: The new foreign policy

Turkish foreign policy makers' constant references to regional dynamics and regional actors as carriers of the new regional order have made Turkey's experience more appealing. As opposed to the polarisation and securitisation of the Iranian and the Saudi models, this new foreign policy strives to solve current conflicts through economic partnership and integration with a non-sectarian position. This model sees sectarian polarisation as a danger not only theologically, but also underlines its potential to justify non-regional interference in regional problems. This model is integrated with the West, but at the same time defends a regional order that is established by regional actors. Erdoğan's effective leadership, combined with foreign policy rhetoric that criticises the Western countries and Israel when needed, is appealing for many in the region.[51] Erdoğan's vocal criticism of Israel during the 2008 Gaza crisis and in 2009 in Davos has made him an important leader who is able to have close and constructive relations with the West but also can be critical and independent of the West at the same time. For people in the region, Turkey is a country that is able to determine its national interests and stand up to the West's influence if necessary, and seems to display the characteristics that these peoples would like to see in their own governments.

Turkey's "critical engagement" with the West as a member of NATO and

a membership candidate to the EU, in other words showing that it can cooperate when necessary and can be independent at the same time, challenges the Iranian and Saudi Arabian models. It shows that one does not have to have a hostile relationship with the West to become an independent and dignified and that being in alliance with the US does not mean one must be obedient to all policies.

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Turkey defends a regional order which is founded by regional actors, respects regional social dynamics and is against any foreign military interference as it harms and delays regional stability. Turkey's claim to manage the "winds of change" in "pioneering" a new regional order centres on democratic vision. The "New Middle East", a term coined and extensively used by Turkish actors, rejects ethnic or sectarian differences as a source for polarisation, and claims to establish this new order as "a peaceful

order based on fraternity". In addition, as a supposedly "central country", Turkey's discourse to be the "owner, pioneer, servant" of the new Middle East that will bring justice to the region will invite other regional powers to participate.[52]

Theo-political vs. political theology: The need for a new language

The most important aspects of the Turkish model are its democratic tradition, civilian control of the military, rule of law, independent foreign policy and its relation with Islam. Contrary to Saudi Arabia and Iran, Turkey does not constitute its political relationship with Islam on strict theological patterns or supra-historical senses; rather uses a historico-political language of "justice" and human rights in formulating its regional vision. Turkey's advantage, on the one hand, is its ability to turn its experience into an applicable form that can be repeated in diverse temporal and spatial contexts. On the other hand, its weakness is its relatively poorer level of religious discourse as a source of legitimacy and intellectual influence on region, simply because of the result of the years of the securitisation of Islam in Turkish domestic politics.[53] The recent lift of the ban against the hijab, including in the parliament, gives the impression

that the Turkish model's secularism is freeing itself from securitisation.

What is common to the countries in post-Arab Spring transition is that the Baathist-secular-authoritarian structures have been replaced by semi-democratic ones where Islamists participate in the political processes. Elections have resulted in either Islamist-dominated governments or an Islamist opposition. The Islamists' participation in a legal political life through democratic elections will lead to the competition of diverse religious interpretations. This will further strengthen the interaction between religion and political legitimacy. In the Iranian and Saudi models, the theo-political struggle that places religion at the centre of their quest for religious influence is the most serious challenge that Turkey will face. What made "the Turkish model" appealing in post 9/11 period was its unique understanding of religion, in other words its "Turkish Islam". Even though the term Turkish Islam sounded good to Western ears, it was not positively received in the Middle East.

In this respect, it is difficult for Turkey to compete with Iran and Saudi Arabia on the basis of theo-political backgrounds while focusing on religious legitimacy in politics, determining politics based on theological attitudes,

bringing religion into political goals and formulating political goals using a religious vocabulary.

What is common to the countries in post-Arab Spring transition is that the Baathist-secular-authoritarian structures have been replaced by semi-democratic ones where Islamists participate in the political processes.

The Turkish model is met by the theo-political claims of Saudi Arabia and Iran, and challenged by the Islamic rhetoric in countries like Egypt. Erdoğan's emphasis on a "religious generation", his increasing usage of religious concepts and his aim to spread religious schools (the imam hatip schools) seems to be an attempt to confront these regional challenges rather than a search for a domestic agenda. Turkey, challenged by theo-political discourses, has to move away from Kemalism's securitisation of religion on the one hand, and has to craft a new political language that does not fall into the trap of theo-politics on the other hand.

As part of this realisation, Turkey has been transforming governmental institutions and the civil society to craft

this language and back its claims of regional leadership. Turkey's increasing role in the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), co-chairing the Alliance of Civilisation initiative[54] and the leadership role that it has assumed on international issues such as Somalia and Rakhine State (Arakan) gives the impression that the relationship between religion and politics is entering an era of transformation. Turkey's recent emphasis on the Ministry of Religious Affairs, hosting meetings such as the Summit of African Islamic Leaders, efforts to carry such projects by using language that unifies and focuses on education to Africa and Asia and attempts to lead in educating clergy is related to this tendency. However, compared to appeal of the polarising and sectarian nature of the theo-political language used by Wahhabism and Shi'ism, it does not seem possible for Turkey to close this gap in the short term.

The Egyptian Model in Flux: From an "Islamic Democratic Model" to a "Liberal" Authoritarianism?

The new coming experience/model of Egypt will be a critical component of the new emerging regional order as it is the fourth power centre. Its geopolitical position, uniting the Levant with Maghreb (in addition to its role as a bedrock of ancient civilisation), makes this country central to the Arab world. This central role feeds two opposite tendencies in interpreting Egypt's geographical location and its application to foreign policy: isolationist and activist. While the first tendency claims that the country should not get involved in regional issues, the second tendency sees Egypt as "a link" between Africa and Eurasia. This second tendency presupposes that Egypt should follow an active foreign policy in Africa and the Arab world and that it should take on a leadership role.[55] In this respect, the hope for change fed by the Tahrir revolution responds to the desire for the rise of Egypt, and to be a leader or model country that will have a dignified foreign policy in the Arab world.

The appeal and limitations of the Egyptian model

With its long historic, religious and cultural past, Egypt has soft power potential. The al Azhar Mosque's central role in the Arab world in religious education supports Egypt's position. Many people, educated in Egyptian schools and either under the influence of Arab nationalism or the Islamic reawakening, currently work in the

educational institutions or ministries in the Gulf countries.[56] That's why Egypt's soft power may influence the domestic politics of the nation-states of the region: Arabism. Decision makers in the Arab countries are being forced to use a pan-Arabist political language in their foreign policy that gives priority to the sensitivities of the Arab public in order to be able to legitimise their domestic policies. Especially after the Arab Spring, the language of Arabism has become a common sentiment that represents the Arab public.[57] However, even though Arabism was the language of political and social demands and this shows that this ideology still has a chance in the region, this does not mean that the Arab Spring had a pan-Arabism agenda which has fallen behind the region's requirements.[58] The defunct President Morsi's administration would have sounded its claim to being a model more loudly if there has been no rupture in the process of democratic transition and if it could transform this social sensitivity into a concrete policy that would appeal to the Arab world's problems and ideals.[59]

Moreover, we can say that there will be two major problems that will challenge Egypt: democratisation and economic development. Stemming from these two issues and the potential threat that a rising democratic Egypt will pose to regional countries, especially to Israel

and Saudi Arabia, a difficult journey awaits Egypt. The concern that Egypt would create due to its location and historical depth can be approached from multiple angles: because of the Gaza issue, the historic bonds between Hamas and the Brotherhood and the prominence of the Camp David Accords in the regional order, Israel saw the Morsi administration and any possibility of a democratic Egypt as a threat. Egypt, as an Arab power, may balance Iran in the Middle East, while all the world powers and regional powers have been involved in the developments in this country. All these critical issues and the foreign interest in Egypt make observers hopeless for the Tahrir revolution. That is why it is quite likely to see the Tahrir revolution become more like the revolutions of 1848 than those of 1989.[60]

Many people, educated in Egyptian schools and either under the influence of Arab nationalism or the Islamic reawakening, currently work in the educational institutions or ministries in the Gulf countries.

No matter how much the Tahrir process gives priority to political demands, Egypt, as the sixth largest natural gas producer, is faced with serious

economic problems. The instability will reduce foreign investment in the country and make the economy even more fragile. The economic conditions are not promising because economic decisions are made by the military elite, who are also part of the economy.[61] In addition, the Egyptian army's inability to fully control the Sinai Peninsula, a situation which led to the constant bombing of the Transjordan gas pipeline, disrupting the country's national gas income. In addition, a decline in tourism revenue would further worsen the situation. For this reason, it is not difficult to predict that Egypt's economic problems will directly affect politics. Also, Egypt under this kind of economic pressure will not easily be able to form its own political line and independent foreign policy very soon. This will negatively affect Egypt's role in forming a new regional order.[62]

The major problem with the Egyptian model is the role of the military in the process of transition to democracy. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) quietly took control of the administration on 11 February 2011. Liberals and Islamist forces, which had united during the revolution, engaged in a power struggle soon after. It emerged during the presidential election on 30 June 2012 that this struggle would prevent the liquidation of the remnants of the old regime and that they could come to power again. The Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohammed Morsi gained 51% of the votes; however, former Prime Minister Ahmad Shafiq won 49%, a clear indication of the old regime's prowess. Eventually, President Morsi's tenure was ended by the army chief commander Abdel Fattah al Sisi's announcement of a *coup d'état* on 3 July 2013 and this was a clear indication of how the democratic transformation was vulnerable to political tides in the country.

After the bloody suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood the transformations in the country and the kinds of political language/practice that will be created will affect the nature of the new regional order.

Although the civil resistance of the Muslim Brotherhood against the coup d'état is really straining the military, Egyptian politics is on the way to establish a new kind of military guardianship regime, which can also be defined as a "liberal" autocracy.[63] This will also contribute to the reproduction of a new authoritarianism in the Middle East. One should be prepared for a long-term new authoritarianism with

the flavouring of democracy. In Egypt, the military tutelage over politics is not likely to be removed in the short term.

The delayed transformation of the Islamic movement in Egypt

The transformation of the Muslim Brotherhood, the leading source of Islamist movements in the Muslim world, would contribute to Egypt's soft power. As opposed to the Salafist Nour Party's demand to apply stringent Sharia codes, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) founded by the Brotherhood called for a civil and democratic state with an Islamic reference. The participation of Egyptian Islamists in politics and their performance was expected to create a new synthesis of Islam and democracy, which might have brought a revolutionary change to the Muslim world. Another critical dimension of the political experience of the Egyptian Islamists has been the competition between Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood. The consequence of this competition will have regional implications that may make for more pragmatic and politically diversified Islamisms to form.[64] The recent coup has made this competition much more complex. Although most of the Salafi groups and parties have taken a pro-Morsi stand, the Nour Party backed military intervention against

Morsi and viewed the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood as "a golden opportunity to advance their political ambitions".[65]

Undoubtedly, after the bloody suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood the transformations in the country and the kinds of political language/practice that will be created will affect the nature of the new regional order. A transformation, based on participation, democratisation, freedom and justice was possible and it had the potential of challenging the sectarian[66] and polarising sides of Shi'ism and Wahhabism by developing a new and pluralistic and non-sectarian Sunnism. A potential religious alliance between al Azhar and the Muslim Brotherhood, even though this potential alliance has been severely tainted by the Grand Sheikh of al Azhar Ahmed el-Tayeb's siding with the 3 July coup d'état, has the capacity to bring Egypt to a very important position in the regional theo-political competition. Going beyond this, both the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Azhar have been challenged by the Salafist movements. The sense of this mutual threat might lead to an alliance being formed for a new Sunnism, which would make way for Egypt to create a new Islamic language. Al Azhar, as the historical centre of *wasatiyya* (centrism) in the Islamic world, may play this role in the region.[67]

One of the most distinctive results of the possible democratic Egypt as a model for the region would be the opportunity that the two democratic models (Turkey and Egypt) would have to cooperate and balance the sectarian and polarising policies of Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, with the recent military intervention, Egypt will continue to be a model in flux for the near future and any transformation of the Muslim Brotherhood will be pushed forward to an uncertain date.

The fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and its regional implications

The Arab Spring paved the way for the Islamist parties in the Middle East and North Africa and launched a new period called "the Muslim Brotherhood Crescent" by the King Abdullah II of Jordan. The victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections marked the start of this period which reached a peak with the Tunisian and the Tahrir revolutions in 2011. Other successful steps of this process included the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party in Morocco, the critical role of Al-Islah Party in Yemen and the increasing power of politicians close to the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya.

The possibility that the civil war in Syria will pave the way for the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria to come to the power fuelled the "Brotherhood Crescent" fear. Nevertheless, the Arab Spring ended when grassroots movement in Syria turned into a civil war. Similarly, there was a reversal when Egyptian Commander-in-Chief and Minister of Defence Abdel Fattah al Sisi overthrew President Morsi on 30 June 2013. The coup, which was supported by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries in order to protect regional status-quo and non-democratic regimes, enabled supporters of the old regime in Egypt to take control. As a result, a period of instability began for Egypt which was expected to serve an inspiring example for the democratisation of the region. It would be wrong to interpret Morsi's overthrow only in terms of Egyptian domestic politics. As a matter of fact, the Muslim Brotherhood experience will greatly influence the political balance in the region in the middle and long term.

That President Morsi was ousted by a coup d'état based on street politics, and that thousands of Morsi supporters were killed with real bullets in Rabia and other squares as senior Muslim Brotherhood officials were sent behind bars put the movements that are close to the Brotherhood in a difficult position. Even though it is still in power, the Justice

and Development Party in Morocco was weakened. The Ennahda movement, which has adopted a reconciliatory policy but has been strongly opposed by the leftist-secular parties and groups since the very beginning, is at risk of being overthrown in Tunisia. Affiliated movements in these countries, on the one hand, try to keep their distance from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. They, on the other hand, seek reconciliatory political means in order not to experience the catastrophe witnessed in Egypt.[68]

This new period, called "the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood", seems to give birth to new consequences in the region. The Muslim Brotherhood has been the mainstream movement of the Islamist movements in the Middle East in the last century. It has influenced and balanced both the Shi'ite and Salafi movements. One may anticipate some losses that would occur in the region due to the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The first and biggest loss due to the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood is the weakening of the legitimacy granted to the discourse of democracy and the will of people that was brought about by the Arab Spring. The opposition ignored the result at the ballot box and took to the streets with the help of the Egyptian army, removing the discussion of democracy. The Sheikh of al Azhar

and the Salafist Nour Party's support for the coup created a pseudo-democracy/revolutionary discourse. This will, in turn, contribute to the birth of new forms of authoritarianism in the region.

> The Morsi administration could have contributed to creating an international public opinion which would both convince the Islamist groups and push Israel to make concessions in the resolution of the Palestinian issue.

Secondly, the democratic transformation of the Muslim Brotherhood would have proven to be the new successful balance between participation and legitimacy to the people of authoritarian regimes in the Gulf. Accordingly, the second wave of democratisation would have swept away these countries with the help of either reforms or new revolutions. It is not a coincidence that the UAE and Saudi Arabia, where the largest number of Muslim Brotherhood supporters live, are behind the coup in Egypt. These countries were able to preserve the *status quo* for now and showed once again that they are on Israel's side in terms of limiting the will of the people in the region. It is meaningful that the Gulf countries, just

like Israel, feel the same fear of the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region and they turned this fear into a common policy.

> The regional policies of these four powers, the structure of their domestic politics, their relations with the West, Russia and Israel, and their interaction and competition will shape the new structure of this regional order.

Thirdly, The Muslim Brotherhood has a critical role in integrating Islamist movements into the democratic system and thus avoiding their radicalisation. The success of this experience would have shown the Islamist grassroots, including the Salafis, that democracy is the only game in town. This would limit the attraction of radical organisations such as al Qaeda to the youth. It seems difficult for the Muslim Brotherhood to protect even its own grassroots from violence when it is kept out of democratic politics.[69] Given the manipulations of deep states and foreign intelligence agencies in the region, it would be a huge success to keep these reacting groups out of violence.

Fourthly, a democratic Egypt led by the Muslim Brotherhood would soften the power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East. Doing politics on the same wavelength as Turkey, the Morsi administration could have put Egypt in a key position in the regional power struggle. The Morsi administration could have contributed to creating an international public opinion which would both convince the Islamist groups and push Israel to make concessions in the resolution of the Palestinian issue.

Fifthly, moderate and democratic religious discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood could have overcome the Shi'ite-Wahhabi polarisation with the help of the new Sunnism. A new religious discourse to be created with the help of the Brotherhood and al Azhar could have balanced the expansionist religious discourse of Iran and Saudi Arabia through petrodollars and sectarianism. The support of the al Azhar leadership for the coup d'état harmed the democratisation process of the Islamic world. However, as the new government needs religious support to justify its authoritarian rule against democratic Islamist movements, these events may paradoxically strengthen the "autonomy and influence" of al Azhar as an institution.[70]

Sixthly, the opportunity of the Muslim Brotherhood to turn "anti-Westernism" into a "soft criticism of the West" was missed. Favouritism towards Israel will continue to incite the hatred of the Islamist movements against the West while these movements believe that the West adopts an insincere attitude towards Egypt as was the case in Algeria.[71] The fall of the Muslim Brotherhood both in Egypt and the region, unfortunately, postponed all these opportunities.

Conclusion

Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt play central roles in the region and are all claiming to be establishing a new regional order. These states use religious and symbolic capital to primarily legitimise the claims of their regimes and administrations and this is very closely related to the model debate. Beyond the different forms of administration and strategic visions, the claims of these models are based on different Islamic interpretations and they place their view of Islam (their theo-political or political theologies) at the heart of the national interests/strategies. The regional policies of these four powers, the structure of their domestic politics, their relations with the West, Russia and Israel, and their interaction and competition will shape the new structure of this regional order.

In this environment, where Iran and Saudi Arabia compete as model countries, Turkey will either stay above sectarian polarisation and develop an "active multidimensional policy" that supports democratic transformation, or it will let the competition flow and accept its passive position.

Considering these alternatives, the new emerging regional order will be established on either a theo-political understanding, in other words on securitisation and alliances based on sectarian polarisation which will lead to more interference from non-regional actors, or on a gradual reform process of economic integration and diplomatic compromise. In the first case, biases and negative perceptions will be deepened in reference to history and to differences in religious interpretation, and will result in conflict, animosity and outside interference. In the second case, there would be a chance to establish a cooperative regional, non-sectarian perspective accompanied by a critical, but not radical, attitude towards the West. A probable new Sunnism would be able to go beyond sectarianism and the polarising agendas of Wahhabism and Shi'ism. This will contribute to

preventing regional conflicts based on sectarianism.

While in Iran a republican model based on *vilayat al-faqih* has lost its ability to inspire other Islamic movements in the region, it still protects and solidifies its influence over Shia groups, especially those in the Gulf, through the ideological indoctrination and aid Iran provides to its partners. However, Iran's influence on Shia groups in the region feeds the fear of a Shi'ite Crescent especially in the Gulf, thus producing a counter-hegemonic "Sunni bloc" under the leadership of Salafism and Wahhabism. In this process, Salafism makes the indirect claim of holding the monopoly to speak for Sunnism. In this environment, where Iran and Saudi Arabia compete as model countries, Turkey will either stay above sectarian polarisation and develop an "active multidimensional policy" that supports democratic transformation, or it will let the competition flow and accept its passive position. With the unyielding attitude it has adopted against the Syrian regime that is massacring its own citizens, Turkey is discovering the

limits of its soft power policies and is turning towards "smart power" policies. Still, the impression that this policy is a democracy promotion policy will attract reaction in the region.

Instability in Egypt may help the Arab monarchies in the region to breathe comfortably for a while. Again, this coup has also given the Bashar al Assad regime in Syria an opportunity to get tougher against its opponents. The removal of Morsi from power has helped Israel's national interests, too. As far as the regional equations are concerned, it is possible to say that the front of democracy formed by Turkey and Egypt has been weakened in the presence of the polarising and pro-sectarian politics of Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is particularly observed that Saudi Arabia will play a critical role in Egyptian politics through Salafis and the petrodollar system. That means deepening competition in terms of making a new regional order in the Middle East. It also means that it will be more difficult for Turkey to balance the Iranian and Saudi Arabian politics of polarisation.

Endnotes

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2 We intentionally employed the concept of "theo-political" instead of political theology. Political theology refers to secularised versions of theological concepts in the realm of politics after centuries of struggle. Carl Schmitt describes this as "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts". See, Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 36. In this theory, "God" turned into "lawgiver" and "miracles" turned into the "exception" in modern politics. As opposed to this political theology, theo-politics, as we coined in this article, refers to something quite the contrary. Theo-politics is the re-theologisation of modern political concepts in a contemporary political context. In this practice, political concepts and positions have been formulated as theological necessities rather than political decisions. This process goes hand in hand with the claim that to "represent the one and the only authentic and legitimate religious position" in the world. Therefore, theo-politics, by definition, works through exclusionary, conflictual, ahistorical and dogmatic mechanism. This new phenomenon among the Muslim-dominated countries of the region carries the risk of turning inter-state political conflicts into sectarian war.

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