

## **TURKEY'S ROLE IN THE CHANGING MIDDLE EASTERN DYNAMICS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

**Nazir Hussain  
Abrar Hussain**

Turkey is an ancient civilization having historically strong cultural, political and economic ties with the rest of the Middle East and Central Asia. Turkey's location at the juncture of Europe and Asia enhances its geostrategic importance in the region. Its rapid economic growth, political stability and military strength make Turkey a regional power having the potential to influence global politics. Moreover, the changes taking place in the Middle East have relegated the traditional regional powers from their position of Arab leadership, paving the way for other regional/extra-regional powers to fill the vacuum. With its historical, religious and cultural linkages with the Middle East, Turkey has begun to impact on the regional dynamics.

Turkey has carved out its role in the regional dynamics of the Middle East by supporting the Palestinian cause, making an effort to mediate in the Iranian nuclear controversy, voicing concern over NATO attacks on Libya, showing eagerness to work out a solution to the Syrian civil war and opposing the growing phenomenon of Islamic State (IS). Therefore, the possibility is that Turkey would continue to play its role in the region as the power shift from the Euro-Atlantic region to Asia continues. However, it is debatable whether Turkey's aim is to play a leading role in the wider Muslim world, or to reconstitute in some form the Ottoman Empire, or to enhance its power in the Middle East. Among the conjectures about Turkey, it is said that it may be presenting itself as an alternate model for the states of the region.

This paper endeavours to analyze the growing Turkish role in the changing Middle Eastern dynamics by tracing its historical involvement, its democratic experience and its economic progress. It also focuses on the Turkish role during the 'Arab Spring' and the new security dynamics unfolding in Iraq and Syria in the form of the Islamic State and the challenges it poses.

### Theoretical context

An important question regarding the regional security complex is the dynamics behind it. Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver<sup>1</sup> perceive the Middle East security complex as being marked by 'perennial conflict formation.' The region is also termed as a 'conflict-driven complex' by Coşkun.<sup>2</sup> In terms of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), the Middle East is an example of the decolonization process transformed into a process of conflict formation. Since it has remained a region of conflict and instability, a regional security structure is still in the process of evolution.<sup>3</sup> As Mohammad Ayoob has pointed out "Negative security dependency is at stake in the case of the Middle East region, since hostile ventures dominate interaction in the region and interactions based on enmity dominates the system."<sup>4</sup> Regional security regimes remained limited and the ability of outside actors to impose a regional security structure are constrained by the complexity of intra-regional relations.

In the Middle Eastern security complex, history, religion, ethnicity, and natural resources along with internal power structures, regional political/ideological rivalries and great power interests are crucial factors and also important variables. The concept of enmity rather than amity is prevalent in the region, where each crisis begins as a local issue and then spills over to become a regional one and often goes on to acquire global dimensions. The regional security complex becomes more complicated as more actors and factors enter the regional security environment. Therefore, the role of Turkey in this region with complexities, can be understood more easily if we study it in the light of the Regional Security Complex Theory.

### The Ottoman legacy and modern Turkey

During the last decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Osman I managed to establish the Ottoman Empire, which later became one of the greatest and longest

---

<sup>1</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 187.

<sup>2</sup> B.B. Coşkun, "Regionalism and Securitization: The Case of the Middle East" in C. Harders and M. Legrenzi (eds.), *Beyond Regionalism: Regional Cooperation, Regionalism and Regionalization in the Middle East* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> M. Ayoob, "From Regional System to Regional Society: Exploring Key Variables in the Construction of Regional Order", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 3 (1999): 247-259.

surviving empires in history. It controlled large areas of the Middle East, North Africa, and a part of Europe.<sup>5</sup> Osman I became the first in a long line of Sultans who ruled the empire, which lasted for over six centuries.<sup>6</sup> Like many other empires, the Ottoman empire also went through the heights of glory and periods of dismal degeneration. Ultimately, it disintegrated as a consequence of the First World War and the new state of the Republic of Turkey emerged out of the remains of the Ottoman empire.<sup>7</sup> Modern Turkey, after overcoming many internal and external enemies, emerged on the map of the globe rejuvenated by a new mission. Soon after the emergence of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, introduced wide ranging political, social and cultural reforms.

The basic objective of the Kemalist reforms in his own words was “the attainment of contemporary level of civilization” a reference to the Western civilization. He tried to break with the Ottoman past and transformed Turkey into a modern nation state, patterned on the European system. In October 1923, the Grand National Assembly proclaimed Turkey a Republic and elected Mustafa Kemal as its first President. In March 1924, “the Assembly abolished the Caliphate and exiled all members of the Ottoman House from Turkish territory”.<sup>8</sup>

Atatürk abolished the office of Sheikh-ul-Islam and the Ministry of Sharia (Islamic jurisprudence) and closed religious schools (*madradas*) and colleges. All religious and mystic orders were banned. He then closed all sacred tombs which were being used as places of worship and retreat. “In November 1925, a law was passed which required all men to wear Western style hats and made the wearing of fez a criminal offence.”<sup>9</sup> In 1937, Article 2 of the Constitution was further amended; it stated: “The Turkish State is Republican (Cumhuriyetci), Nationalist (Milliyetci), Populist (Halkci), Statist (Devletci), Secularist (Laik), and Revolutionary (Inkilapci).” In the post-

---

<sup>5</sup> A.L. MecFie, *The End of Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923* (London: Longman Publishers, 1998), 178-182.

<sup>6</sup> Marian Kenet, *The Great Powers and the End of Ottoman Empire* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 125-135.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas A. Howard, *The History of Turkey* (New York: Greenwood Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Halil Erdemir, *Why Turks Turned Their Faces to the West?* (Izmir: ManisaOfset, 2006).

Ataturk era these six principles became the basis of Kemalism, the ideology of the Republic.<sup>10</sup>

### **Evolution of democracy in modern Turkey**

The Republican People's Party (RPP) had been in power since the early 1920s. A combination of internal and external factors compelled the leadership to create a more participative and broad based quasi democratic political setup. Mustafa Ismet Inonu, who succeeded Attaturk as Turkish President after the former's death was a diehard Kemalist. However, he was not only wise enough to realize the need for change, but actually brought it about. This was another turning point in the history of Turkey. However, Inonu soon found himself facing a political crisis, as opposition within the RPP grew into an open revolt.

In January, 1946, the Democratic Party (DP) headed by Celal Bayar was registered.<sup>11</sup> All the four founding members, viz. Celal Bayar, Adnan Menderes, Refik Koraltan, and Professor Fuat Koprulu, were former members of the RPP. The Democratic Party swept the elections held on May 14, 1950. The DP won 408 seats in a House of 487 with the RPP reduced to 69 seats from 390 seats in the previous Assembly. Celal Bayar was elected the first civilian President of the Republic and Adnan Menderes took over as Prime Minister. However, in the next elections in 1957, the Democratic Party's popularity had gone down for it secured 48% of votes with 424 seats out of a total of 610, while the RPP's popularity rose to 41% from the previous 31% of votes, and it won 178 seats. By the beginning of 1958, the government had become totally isolated from all the institutions of the state. Moreover, bad governance led to general discontentment and the much feared, long expected military coup took place on May 27, 1960, which was the first in the history of the Republic of Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, these military interventions continued till the 1990s.

The emergence of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 under the leadership of Abdullah Gul and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, completely changed Turkish politics and foreign policy approaches towards Europe and the Middle East. Erdogan announced the 'Zero Problem Policy' (ZPP), with

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 280.

<sup>12</sup> Talip Kucukcan, "State, Islam, and Religious Liberty in Modern Turkey: Reconfiguration of Religion in the Public Sphere", *BYU Law Review*, issue 2 (2003): 490.

neighbouring countries. At a time when several of Turkey's neighbouring countries were struggling for democracy and getting rid of monarchies, Turkey under the stewardship of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) adopted a more assertive role in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Since coming to power in 2002, Erdogan has tackled difficult problems with considerable success. One such challenge emerged in May 2013, when there was turmoil in the country as a result of widespread and large public demonstrations. People had come out on the roads in Istanbul and began demonstrating against the government's decision to build an Ottoman-style building and shopping centre in Gezi Park, uprooting the park's trees. These demonstrations later spread into many other cities of the country. The government decided to suppress the protesters with brute force. These events, not unexpectedly affected Erdogan's position in Turkey, but he was able to win the presidential election in 2014 through direct popular vote. He further consolidated his position by sidelining Abdullah Gul and appointing former Foreign Minister Devutoglu as the new Prime Minister.

#### **Turkey's economic progress under AKP**

Turkey has witnessed a healthy turnaround in the economy since 2001. "It has recorded a remarkable GDP growth rate of almost 6% in average during the period 2002-2011. Thus, per capita income increased to \$10,500 in 2011, from the modest figure of \$3,500 recorded in 2002. Today, Turkey is the 17th largest economy in the world with a GDP of about \$800 billion in 2012."<sup>14</sup> According to the Turkish Central Bank, "Monetary policies played a crucial role in securing macroeconomic balances and reining in inflation over the last decade... CPI inflation was 6.16% in 2013 and forecasted to settle down around 5% in 2014."<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, according to the Central Bank "international reserves reached up to \$1003 billion by the end of 2012."<sup>16</sup> According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the volume of Turkish exports had risen to \$1526 billion in

---

<sup>13</sup> Fadi Hakura, Lale Kemal, Fuat Keyman and Taha Özhan, *Turkey and the Arab World: Ambition and Evolution*, (London: Chatham House, 2012). Online available at [www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org).

<sup>14</sup> "Economic Outlook of Turkey", The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey, available from [www.mfa.gov.tr/prospects-and-recent-developments-in-the-turkish-economy.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/prospects-and-recent-developments-in-the-turkish-economy.en.mfa).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

2012 from \$36 billion in 2002. The total trade volume amounted to \$389.1 billion in 2012. Exports increased by 13.9% on an annual basis amounting to \$1526 billion. Imports shrank by 1.6% decreasing to \$236.5 billion. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed “Turkish Direct Investment stood at \$130 billion by 2012 and Privatization revenues reached to \$44 billion in the same period.”<sup>17</sup>

The remarkable progress and growth of the Turkish economy presents a viable model for other countries of the region to emulate. This strengthening of the Turkish economy has reduced the chances of unrest and revolt against the government.

### **Turkish policy in the changing regional security dynamics**

The Middle East is a “conflict prone” region with unmitigated political, ideological and military rivalries. The Turkish policy of “zero problems with neighbours” was a positive approach for entering the region.<sup>18</sup> It helped Turkey to mend its relations with many states in the region, including Iraq and Syria. However, the dramatic changes in the socio-political landscape of the region put Turkey in an awkward position. It was faced with the choice of earning the goodwill of the Arab people or the autocratic leaders. Turkey supported the people and opposed the authoritarian governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria during the ‘Arab Spring.’

### **The “Arab Spring”**

The Arab Spring was a manifestation of the wish of the Arab people for socio-economic and political change. The Arab people were yearning for a reassertion of the Arab identity alongwith democracy and popular government.<sup>19</sup> When the masses came out on the streets to voice their demands in many parts of the Arab world, the western world was taken by surprise. The people on the streets put the decades old authoritarian regimes on the defensive; they displayed unprecedented resolve, resilience and determination to secure a participatory and accountable

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye 'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position], (İstanbul: Küre, 2001), 85.

<sup>19</sup> Nazir Hussain, “Unrest and Revolt in the Arab World: Impact on Regional Security”, *Pakistan Horizon* 64, no. 3 (July 2011).

government and the welfare of the ordinary man; they wanted an end to monarchies and authoritarian regimes.<sup>20</sup>

In this backdrop, the Turkish experience of democracy and market economy was seen as a viable model. Many in the Arab world were inspired by the Turkish successes and wanted their countries to replicate the Turkish political and economic model.<sup>21</sup> However, “Despite Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's popularity on the Arab street, both old and emerging new elites expressed reservations about the Turkish model. It is instructive that the Muslim Brotherhood criticized Erdoğan's lauding of secularism during his visit to Egypt.”<sup>22</sup> The Arab Spring became a blessing in disguise for Turkey, which could now present its system as an alternative to the decaying state structure in the Arab world. Therefore, Turkey stressed that “this Tunisian revolt is not a nation revolt – is not a revolt of one country. It is a widespread regional revolt because now it is time for change.”<sup>23</sup>

Turkey perceived the popular uprising as a manifestation of the natural desire of the Arab people for change and thus sided with them. Erdoğan, then Prime Minister even asked Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to step down in deference to the popular demand of the Egyptians.<sup>24</sup> However, the dynamics of the popular movement began to change; Hosni Mubarak was succeeded by Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammad Morsi who was soon ousted by General Sisi, who had the support of the traditional regional powers. The civil war in Syria, the turmoil in Iraq, the Kurdish issue and rise of the Islamic State (IS), began to reshape the regional dynamics and pose challenges to the assertive Turkish policy in the Middle East.

### **Civil war in Syria**

The armed rebellion in Syria operated in a more organized manner, but initially it started as a protest movement against the Assad regime. But this

---

<sup>20</sup> F. Ajami, “The Arab Spring: What We Know Now?”, *Hoover Digest*, 2 (6 April 2012).

<sup>21</sup> T. B. Park Kucukcan, M. Ayooob and T. Ozhan, “The New Middle East and Turkish Foreign Policy”, in Müjge Küçükkeleş (ed.), *Policy Debate Series*, 2 (13 October 2011), 22.

<sup>22</sup> I. Afacan, “Abant Platform: The Arab Spring and Turkey's Role”, *Turkish Review* 2, no.1 (Jan-Feb 2012): 122-127.

<sup>23</sup> A. Davutoğlu, “Turkey's Foreign Policy Objectives in a Changing World” Speech on 10 February 2012, Washington D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

<sup>24</sup> S. Cornell, “Changes in Turkey: What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?”, *Middle East Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 13-24.

opposition movement soon split into multiple forces, emerging as full stakeholders in the Syrian civil war. The Syrians are experiencing the worst security situation in the escalating civil war.<sup>25</sup> In the beginning, the opposition struggled hard to bring the rural areas under control and carve out “de facto safe zones” as the provincial level military structures were under the Free Syrian Army’s (FSA) control.<sup>26</sup>

In April-May 2012, the UN intervened to broker a ceasefire but failed to do so. The rebels then took control of a large territory in the north as well as some urban areas. In 2012, President Bashar al Assad had insufficient forces to counter the strong and organized opposition so he decided to focus on the areas which were near the city of Homs. In 2013, with the help of Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militia, Syrian forces got al-Qusyr back from the opposition. The Syrian regime then started targeting the strategic areas that allowed the flow of weapons from Lebanon.<sup>27</sup> However, the civil war is still continuing, with the result that there are millions of refugees and internally displaced persons and the country is in shambles.

The Syrian crisis has serious implications as it could lead to the destabilization of the broader region. As Assad lost control over Syria, a large number of other actors entered the fray and the war turned into a sectarian confrontation. The important players involved in this civil war have tried to justify their involvement. Assad has portrayed himself as the defender of Arab nationalism as well as a secular Syria, guaranteeing protection to the minorities including Druze, Christians and others.<sup>28</sup> Iran and the Hezbollah are supporting Syria due to religious affiliations and Assad has defined his opponents as “*jihadists* and *takfiris*” (Sunni extremists who have links with al-Qaeda). He warned of horrific consequences if his regime falls; for example the regime’s message to the Alawi community to which Assad belongs, is simple: “If we die, you will die

---

<sup>25</sup> Nazir Hussain, “Syrian Crisis and Regional Order in the Middle East”, *Pakistan Horizon* 66, no.4 (October 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Holliday, “Syria’s Maturing Insurgency”, *Middle East Security Report* 5 (Institute for the Study of War, June 2012): 7.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth O’Bagy, “The Fall of al-Qusayr” Institute for the Study of War (6 June 2013), available at [www.understandingwar.org](http://www.understandingwar.org).

<sup>28</sup> “President al-Assad gives interview to the German Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper” *SANA News*, 17 June 2013.



with us.”<sup>29</sup> Turkey bordering Syria is in danger of being directly affected by the civil war. Ankara has amended its policy on Syria; it now plays a somewhat neutral role due to Iranian and Russian support to the Bashar regime. However, in the face of several challenges, Turkey cannot afford to isolate itself in the region.

### **Turmoil in Iraq**

Iraq is a Shia majority state; taking this fact into account, the Sunni Arabs were lacking confidence in the new state in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq. In different ways, sectarian identity was institutionalized in the revived Iraqi politics after the fall of Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime. Under the Baathist regime, most of the Shia Arabs were left out of politics, and they were often brutally crushed by Saddam Hussein. The Sunni Arabs, after the fall of the Saddam regime initially feared that they would now be treated in the same way. This fear emerged owing to the new governments' attempt to eliminate those who had been part of the previous regime or had close links with it.<sup>30</sup> Sunni apprehensions were further strengthened by the constitution which was endorsed by a national referendum, that had been rejected by the Sunni majority provinces of Anbar and Salah ad-Din. During 2006, Iraq saw intense sectarian violence, but after that non-sectarian parties gained ground. The Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya) under the leadership of Ayad Allawi emerged as a viable cross-sectarian party in which many popular Sunni Arab leaders were included. However, Prime Minister Maliki using his position constituted a de-baathification commission and an Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC) to harass and arrest his political rivals before the 2010 elections. Thus around 500 candidates, the majority of them Sunnis were disqualified.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, Maliki exercised a high degree of influence over state institutions like the Central Bank of Iraq, the judiciary, the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and the Integrity Commission, and appointed loyalists in these bodies to check his political rivals and promote his

---

<sup>29</sup> Jackson Diehl, "Lines in the Sand: Assad Plays the Sectarian Card", *World Affairs Journal* (May/June 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Eric Davis, "The Question of Sectarian Identities in Iraq", *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010): 232.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Wicken, "The Hashemi Verdict and the Health of Democracy in Iraq", *Political Update* (Institute for the Study of War, 11 September 2012).

political allies.<sup>32</sup> The marginalization of Sunni leaders and the targeting of the Sunnis in general by Maliki is very similar to the occurrences in Syria, which is why in May 2013, a renowned Sunni protest leader, Said al-Lafi said in a meeting in Qatar that “our revolution in Iraq is an extension of that in Syria” and declared that “Sunni blood is one.”<sup>33</sup> The phenomenon of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) seems to be an extension of the same sectarian conflict. Though Maliki has been succeeded by the moderate Haider al-Abadi, the political turmoil rooted in sectarianism continues to pose a severe challenge to regional security and the Turkish role.

### **The Kurdish issue**

The AK party is committed to solve the Kurdish issue since it came into power in the 2002 elections. However, the old structures of state in Turkey still pose serious threats to change and progress. For instance, the military in Turkey has a key role in politics, which is one of the main features of the old structures. The government, however, claims that it is in full control of all the state institutions, including the army. Thus, there are hopes that the Kurdish issue can be resolved in the next few years, if not earlier.<sup>34</sup> Some steps in the right direction have been taken by the AKP government with regard to the Kurds, such as their inclusion in political, economic and social structures as well as allowing the use of the Kurdish language in the national media.

In 2009, a proposal was initiated as a major step towards the solution of the issue. It centred on a new, more democratic constitution, which would ensure the protection of minorities and promote civil liberties and human rights.<sup>35</sup> Considering the old structure, this proposal was a significant development that could help resolve the Kurdish issue as well as bring about progressive change at a broader level. Most importantly, it was official recognition of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. This initiative by the AKP government was warmly welcomed and supported by all the political

---

<sup>32</sup> Marisa Cochrane Sullivan, “Maliki’s Authoritarian Regime,” *Iraq Update* (Institute for the Study of War, April 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Wicken and Jessica Lewis, “From Protest Movement to Armed Resistance”, *Iraq Update* (14 June 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Fadi Hakura, Lale Kemal, Fuat Keyman and Taha Özhan, “Turkey and the Arab World”.

<sup>35</sup> Fuat Keyman, “Turkey’s New Constitution: Transformation, Democratization, and Living Together” e-International Relations (25 July 2012), retrieved from <http://www.e-ir.info>. Also see Ömer Taşpınar, “Will AKP’s Victory Finally Lead to a New Constitution in Turkey?”, The Brookings Institution (June 2011).

forces, the civil society and the ordinary people throughout the country. The September 12, 2010 referendum was clear evidence of this support, for 58 percent of the Turkish population voted for the proposed constitutional changes and democratic reforms.<sup>36</sup> On the whole, during the last decade, socio-political and economic conditions have changed considerably and the AKP government has taken some significant positive steps with regard to the Kurdish issue. However, a reconciliation between the different groups and stakeholders and the government are of the utmost importance for facilitating the solution of the Kurdish question. It will also ensure a political solution of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Failure to do so would pose additional challenges to Turkey not only inside its borders but also abroad. In October-November 2014 street demonstrations were held in Turkey and major European states, against the Turkish government's decision not to support the Kurds against the Islamic State. Its policies in the region could thus be jeopardized.

#### **The Salafist threat and Islamic State(IS)**

The rise of Salafism in the region in recent years poses another daunting challenge to state structures and the existing regional order in the Middle East. Salafism did not arise due to widely prevalent poverty or corrupt political practices; it rose because it had strong ideological following in a region stricken by sectarianism, which spread through public sermons, TV talk shows and persuasive preaching by educated middle class zealots.<sup>37</sup> It is believed that so far Turkey has remained insulated from the regional turmoil due to the Kurdish population on its borders and the Syrian regime's fight against the Salafist threat. Now, as Turkey has entered the political/security dynamics of the region, it cannot avoid collision with the fast emerging religious radicalism near its doorsteps. Moreover, the rapid rise of the Islamic State with its global agenda of setting up a 'Caliphate' and its forceful advances in Iraq and Syria and its inroads even in Turkey constitute the most formidable threat to the regional order and the state system.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Hakura, Kemal, Keyman and Özhan, "Turkey and the Arab World".

<sup>37</sup> Zachary Laub, "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 14 October 2014, available at [www.cfr.org](http://www.cfr.org).

<sup>38</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "The War between ISIS and al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement", Research Notes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, No. 20 (June 2014).

**Prospects**

When in 2009 Turkey initiated its policy of “Zero-Problems with neighbours” to mend fences with the regional states, the political environment was much better and functioning smoothly. Ankara’s action of sending a flotilla to help the besieged Palestinians in Gaza in 2010 earned Turkey the goodwill of the Arab masses and it began to be perceived as an alternate political model to replace the traditional power structure at the state and regional levels. However, the ensuing regional political turmoil has perplexed the Turkish leadership. The ‘Arab Spring’, the crises in Iraq and Syria, the stubborn Kurdish issue spread across the borders of Iraq, Syria and Turkey and the rise of the IS, along with the resistance of traditional actors against Turkey playing a prominent role in the Middle East challenge the new Turkish assertiveness in the region. Moreover, the political unrest within Turkey, its double speak on the IS, and the lack of a more proactive policy for resolving the Kurdish issue point to bleak prospects for the continuation of an assertive Turkish policy in the ‘perennial conflict formation’ region, where every crisis leads to another crisis. However, Turkey is likely to remain involved in regional politics in order to retain its relevance.

The “Turkish Model” depicts the Turkish values of modernity, democracy, secularism and Islam judiciously combined. This model has begun to lose its appeal mainly owing to two reasons. First, because of the authoritarian behaviour of Prime Minister Erdogan and second, because of the geo-strategic location of Turkey, which after the Second World War developed close relations with the West. Turkey is a member of NATO and is very keen to join the European Union. These factors somehow make the “Turkish Model” less attractive and relevant for the other countries of the region.

The political unrest on Republic Day in 2014 shows that Turkey is still fighting with its past and is struggling to keep a balance between religion, secularism and democracy. It cannot continue to play a leading role in the region unless it chalks out a clear direction for its identity either as a West-oriented country aspiring to become a member of the European Union (EU), or a country which has its own brand of what can be called ‘religious secularism’. Turkey also needs to further consolidate its political system and economy, to enable it to play a more assertive role in regional politics in future.

**Conclusion**

Turkey has historical roots in the Middle East region. Its culture and religion along with its relatively impressive economic progress and political stability make it a potentially viable political model in the failing state structure of the region. It has become more proactive and involved in the Middle East in recent years. However, the internal dynamics of the country and regional security issues pose serious challenges to Turkey's aspiration to adopt a more assertive and long-term role in the region. Seen in the light of the Regional Security Complex Theory, the problems in the Middle East are complicated, involving many regional and extra-regional actors and their conflicting strategic interests. Resolving the new and old issues in the region has become more and more difficult. Turkish involvement in the regional security issues could not only cause more complications but also put Turkey in a most delicate position, for it would be forced to take sides at the cost of its national security interests.

It would therefore be better for Turkey to first put its own house in order before it gets more deeply involved in a region which has always been conflict prone. It must uphold and safeguard its democracy, economic growth and moderation in religious matters before it presents itself as an "Alternate Model". However, Turkey must take the Salafist/IS threat seriously for the sake of its own people and the region at large, for if this threat is not tackled, sooner or later it will knock at the doors of Turkey.