Panel Proposal for Middle East Dialogue 2020

Political Transformations and New Challenges to Democracy in the Middle East: Underlying Philosophy and Relevant Case Studies

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PAPER ABSTRACT | Islamic Political Philosophy: A Critical Genealogy

Dr. Muqtedar Khan

In this paper, I offer a critical genealogy of Islamic political philosophy and the development of Islamic political thought from the age of the rightly guided caliphs to the contemporary Arab Spring. I look at key classical thinkers like Al-Mawardi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Khaldun and important contemporary thinkers such as Syed Qutb, Maududi, Khomeini and Al-Nabbhani. This paper concludes with a critique of Islamic political thought for privileging identity and power, structure and law and
ignoring governing process and the mystical dimensions of Islam. In this paper, I also explore the Islamic conception of democracy as advanced by several contemporary theorists. This paper includes a review of Sufi understanding of politics and argues that the preliminary ideas advanced by Sufi thinkers like Sheikh Saa’di in his works *Gulistan* and *Bostan* indicate the potential to develop a political philosophy based on the concept of Ihsan, specially the mystical understanding of Ihsan. This paper exposes the diversity of approaches to Islamic political thought in order to emphasize that the Shariah-based approach to politics is only one Islamic way of thinking about politics. There are many.

**Brief Bio: Dr. Muqtedar Khan**

Dr. Muqtedar Khan is a Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware. He was the academic director of the US State Department’s National Security Institute, 2016-2019 and is currently the academic director of the American Foreign Policy Institute, 2019-2021, at the Institute for Global Studies, University of Delaware. He was a Senior Nonresident Fellow of the Brookings Institution (2003-2008) and he is currently a Senior Fellow with the Center for Global Policy. His most recent book *Islam and Good Governance: Political Philosophy of Ihsan* was published in April 2019 by Palgrave Macmillan and has won an award for excellence in scholarship. He is also the author of several books: *American Muslims: Bridging Faith and Freedom* (Amana, 2002), *Jihad for Jerusalem: Identity and Strategy in International Relations* (Praeger, 2004), *Islamic Democratic Discourse* (Lexington Books, 2006), *Debating Moderate Islam: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (University of Utah Press, 2007). Dr. Khan is a frequent commentator in the international media. His articles and commentaries can be found at [www.ijtihad.org](http://www.ijtihad.org). His academic publications can be found at [https://udel.academia.edu/MuqtedarKhan](https://udel.academia.edu/MuqtedarKhan)

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Olga Gerasimenko (University of Delaware)
The Role of State-Controlled Media in Turkey after the 2016 Coup Attempt

While problems with freedom of expression in Turkey existed before, the deterioration of the press freedom further intensified under the state of emergency declared after the 2016 coup attempt. This paper looks at the functions performed by the Turkey’s media (specifically, one pro-governmental news outlet) as the country is moving away from democracy. Daily Sabah (DS) became an essential tool for Turkey’s campaign to condemn the West and legitimize Erdogan’s policies and consolidation of power. Turkey as a victim of Western aggression and the Western media’s anti-Turkey stance became a crucial part of the national rhetoric.

I conduct a discourse analysis of the DS’s coverage of the post-coup attempt situation in Turkey, and a content analysis of three months of post-coup coverage using the NVivo software. The discourse created by the Turkish government and broadcast through DS aims to alter the existing international norms, knowledge, and perception of truth. I identify major themes and trends of pro-government broadcasting in Turkey, as well as smaller and more subtle elements of the verbal politics. Interestingly, while Turkey has recently appeared increasingly authoritarian, the state-controlled media coverage at the time of the coup does not reject the idea of democracy altogether, but rather manipulates it to serve its goals.

The rise of Daily Sabah occurred amid the ongoing drift towards authoritarianism under the Erdogan regime, and, in particular, the changes of the president’s attitude towards the international press – from vocal support of press freedom to attacks and condemnation of the international media for their interference and bias. The central theme of the coverage is Fethullah Gulen and the Gulen movement, which is labeled a terrorist organization. The blame assigned to Gulen is described in a categorical form and without much of an explanation. This approach allows for a dichotomy of “us” vs. “them,” in which everyone who goes against the official rhetoric (or, even, does not explicitly condemn the coup attempt) is simply labeled a terrorist or siding with terrorists. Consequently, the US is portrayed as a supporter of terrorism.
"Our record of success in mediating and implementing peace agreements is sadly blemished by some devastating failures. Indeed, several of the most violent and tragic episodes of the 1990s occurred after the negotiation of peace agreements — for instance in Angola in 1993 and in Rwanda in 1994. Roughly half of all countries that emerge from war lapse back into violence within five years." (Annan, 2005)

"Negotiating a peace agreement between warring ethnic groups is only half the job. Implementing the agreement is just as important, and can be more difficult and complex than the negotiations." (Lake & Rothchild, 1996, p. 75)

This paper seeks to reveal why civil wars recur after the negotiations start. Bringing conflicting sides to the negotiation table and making them sign a Peace Agreement (PA) can be a very challenging process. Moreover, the success rate of actually achieving peace after signing a PA is not promising (Matanock, 2017, p. 93). To explain this discrepancy, many scholars have explored reasons for Negotiation and PA implementation failures and civil war recurrence by examining both sides of a conflict, both rebel and state factions (Bercovitch & de Rouen, 2004; Crocker, Hampson, & Aall, 1999; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003; Stedman, 2001; Toft, 2009; Walter, 1999, 2002). In this research, my focus is on states and their contribution to civilian conflicts. My interpretation of the state’s role in peace process significantly differs from that of many scholars in that they have tended to assess the state as “one unitary actor.” However, in my view, states should be approached as a “combined actor” (i.e., not unitary), made up of many independently acting branches (i.e., executive, legislative, judicial, military, and media) who work together. One might normally expect the heterogeneous composition of the state to affect the implementation and success of peacebuilding process.

In sum, instead of examining the state as a unitary body that is expected to act homogenously in civilian conflicts, I argue that the individual actions of each actor substantially affect the success of peace process. I argue that the extent of the consensus between Key PActs will substantially influence the likelihood of the peacebuilding
success. The closer key actors are to consensus, the more likely they will be to achieve peaceful conditions.

Colombia’s former president Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for pursuing a peace deal (Casey, 2016). However, the situation is now very fragile; investment and economic development have yet to manifest, infrastructure and government services continue to fail, and as many as 3,000 ex-rebels have restarted fighting. New armed groups are emerging and the drug trade is again on the rise (Casey, 2019). In the Philippines, President Duterte is having a difficult time implementing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which was signed in 2014. He signed the law to create an autonomous region in Mindanao. However, Congress voted in December to extend martial law and the suspension of habeas corpus for another year (Freedom House, 2019). Meanwhile, militant groups continue their attacks (Freedom House, 2019). In Turkey, negotiations, which ripened in more than five years, ended abruptly in 2015 and the violence restarted. These three striking examples are just among many peace processes that began with positive feelings and hope for reaching a sustainable peace, but now stumble. The question, then, is what factors actually cause the recurrence of violent ethnic conflict.

It is crucial to review the literature to delineate this gap. There have been studies on the effects of relationships among different actors such as: a) the state and rebels, b) the state and third parties, c) the state, rebels, and third parties, d) within the rebel group, and even e) among third parties and international actors. However, assessing the state as a unitary actor can be misleading. Multiple individuals affect government policies. The executive branch is one actor, the opposition party (or parties) in parliament is another, the judiciary (especially supreme audit institutions such as the Supreme Court or High Court) is a third, and in some cases the military makes up a fourth.

Each Key PAct has different interests and dynamics. Thus, as in Putnam’s “two-level games,” the executive branch, after dealing with the rebel group, should strike a number of “mini-balancing(s)” among Key PActs to obtain their consent/approval (1988). I define consensus as the sum of the executive branch’s mini-balancing(s) with
other Key PActs. Therefore, if a consensus is achieved at least between these key actors, the PA will be more likely to signed and implemented, and thus, civil war will not recur.

Ahmet Ates (University of Delaware)
15th July 2016 Coup Attempt and the Transformation of Turkish Intelligence Community

The coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 not only transformed the Turkish political spectrum but also led to a transformation of the Turkish intelligence community. I argue that this transformation occurred in three domains: 1) a change in threat perceptions, 2) change in Turkish intelligence tradecraft and 3) change in the organizational structure of the Turkish intelligence community.

Right after the coup attempt, Turkish policymakers and senior intelligence and national security officials declared a shift in threat perceptions of Turkish national security machinery. Per the official documents of the Turkish National Security Council and reports of Turkish principal intelligence agency (MIT) and army intelligence, Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO) was declared as the major national security threat to Turkey. In addition to this declaration, these documents also pointed to the FETO’s infiltration to the Turkish civilian and military bureaucracy.

As a result of the shift in the Turkish threat perceptions, several changes occurred within Turkish intelligence organizations to counter mentioned threats more effectively. The MIT’s mission concept was dramatically expanded with decrees. On the domestic level, MIT was authorized to conduct intelligence activities within the Turkish Army and bureaucracy, started to recruit former FETO members, and changed its recruitment policy. On the external level, it began to have an aggressive approach and hunt down FETO members abroad. The police and army intelligence, on the other hand, focused more on internal investigations and instead of counterterrorism intelligence. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ intelligence branch (GIGY) and The Turkish Ministry of Economy and Treasury’s financial intelligence units also changed their approach and were tasked to assist the MIT to capture FETO members abroad and freeze their financial assets.
Lastly, several organizational changes occurred in the Turkish intelligence community. Two weeks after the coup attempt, the Turkish Air Force Military Academy, the Turkish Land Forces War, the Turkish Naval Forces Military Academy, and the Turkish Gendarmerie Military Academy were dissolved by the Turkish government with a decree and the Turkish National Defense University was founded under the Turkish Ministry of National Defense. Likewise, the Undersecretary of Public Order and Safety was abolished while MIT was restructured under the Turkish Presidency and strengthened its position in the Turkish national security system.

In conclusion, the failed coup attempt in 2016 led to a transformation of the Turkish intelligence community. As soon as FETO became the primary threat, Turkish intelligence organizations reallocated most of their focus, assets, and resources to counter FETO. Consequently, several organizational changes occurred within the Turkish intelligence community.

İbrahim Enes Aksu (University of Delaware)

Populist Foreign Policy-making: A Comparative Study on Trump and Erdoğan’s Policies on Israel-Palestine Conflict

Do populist governments follow different foreign policy-making processes than non-populist governments? My answer is yes. As I try to answer this question through my case studies, I argue that the Trump administration in the US and Erdoğan administration in Turkey currently conduct a populist foreign policy in their dealing with Israeli-Palestine conflict, comparing with non-populist governments in their respective countries. In order to test my hypothesis, I need to start with how to define populist foreign policy-making, which first requires to comprehend what populism refers to. In order to explain populism, I subscribe to the ideational approach, which defines this term as an ideology that puts “the people” as an entity with moral advantage against “the elite” that is seen as corrupt (Stanley, 2008). According to the populist policy-makers, however, “the people” is against two enemies “the elite” and “others” in the foreign policy realm, and populist politicians consider “the people” as a sacred community, differentiating it from those outsiders based on “symbols, tropes,
and ideas, and the feelings of belonging, difference and entitlement they reinforce or even generate” (DeHanas & Shterin, 2018).

First, as the populist government in the US, Trump administration employed the policy of “America First,” and has claimed to focus on preserving and advancing the national interests of the US rather than primarily sponsoring its allies’ interests and universal moral values (Carpenter, 2017). Therefore, the national security has become top priority in the US, which, in accordance with the populist narrative, necessitates weakening, containment, and sometimes total destruction of archenemies (i.e. Iran, Daesh/ISIS, and other “radical Islamist” and terrorist groups), instead of caring about the moral “cosmopolitan” values of the international community and the elite. Thus, the regional allies of the US have gained prominence, and having a close relationship with them has meant to serve the interests of the people. For this reason, the populist administration in the US has thought that they can convince the American people about the necessity to make billions of dollars of military and economic aids to Israel, and to have close ties with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and UAE due to their significance in containing Iran and radical Islamist groups. Thus, its populist foreign policy requires the Trump administration to follow a policy biased toward Israel against Palestinian people.

Secondly, to explain the foreign policy of Erdoğan administration in Turkey, the scholarly debates are revolved around two central themes: Islamism and authoritarianism. It is conventionally argued that Erdoğan administration was pro-democratic, following a reformist agenda, but then, embraced authoritarianism and Islamism after eradicating the military elite’s impact on politics (Cornell, 2012) (Özbudun, 2014) to realize the centralization of power, diminish the authority of democratic institutions, and sweep away any dissident opinion. However, I agree with Özpek & Yaşar (2019) in that this mainstream scholarship falls short in illuminating why Erdoğan has abolished his initial reformist democratic agenda, and which one of the two, Islamism or authoritarianism, does inherently exist within Erdoğan administration. For this reason, I believe it is more important to examine the relation between Erdoğan’s populism and how he runs Turkey’s foreign policy. Öniş (2014), for example, claims that Erdoğan has gained the respect of Muslim-majority Middle Eastern societies not due to
his Islamism but his rhetoric and stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and his open
support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Turkey’s foreign policy on Israel-
Palestine conflict is no exception in comprising populist patterns. In describing “the
people,” the government includes both Turkish people as well as other Muslim peoples
who are portrayed as victims (mazlums in Turkish) of oppression (i.e. Palestinians and
adherents of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) under cruel (zalim in Turkish) regimes who
receive aid and recognition from their international allies. Therefore, Erdoğan
administration follows a populist foreign policy on Israel-Palestine conflict, which is
based on a dichotomy that it represents as: the Turkish people with mazlum peoples vs.
the elite in zalim regimes with their international allies.