

## **The Impact of Islamic Awakening on International Relations**

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### **Abstract**

Before the Islamic Awakening, the international system was the main shaping factor for the regional trends of Western Asia (Middle East). But after the political developments known as the Islamic Awakening or the Arab Spring, and the entry of new elements such as people and public opinion in the political equitation of the region, the regional trends of Western Asia has become more influential in the international arena. In a way that after these developments, the formation of Global Awakening known as Occupy Wall Street Movement is considerable. Therefore, the question of this paper is to determine how Islamic Awakening has affected international relations. In this regard, the issue would be discussed from the perspective of Structure and Agent. In this way, the impacts of Islamic Awakening developments on the structure and functions of the international system would be reviewed.

**Key Words:** Islamic Awakening, Public Opinion, Wall Street, Western Asia, Social Networks, Arab Spring.

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## 1. Introduction

In the Aftermath of the rapid and multi-dimensional developments in the MENA region, particularly in the key Islamic-Arabic countries and also as a result of the Islamic Awakening in combating the domestic and foreign domination in these countries, which were hugely considered as a reproduction of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the region has faced new conditions and embraces new characteristics which obviously affect the former structure and equitation of the international system. The Islamic Awakening developments are considered so significant that many scholars have argued that, these developments will result in new Geopolitics and Culture in the region and affect the global order as well.

The Challenges of Islamic Awakening developments to the former situation and order in the MENA region are so deep and profound that a true understanding of its multidimensional effects needs to be studied carefully. To realize its importance, it is sufficient to remind that, neither the former dictators of the region nor the western powers could predict and prevent such events.

Due to the importance of these developments, some scholars from different parts of the globe especially from the Muslim world have studied the process of shaping such movements, the aspiration of people, major forces of these developments as well as probable future of MENA region. In these regard, in the beginning of this study, we would mention some of the related literature and then peruse the multidimensional effects of Islamic Awakening developments to the international system.

Although different politicians and scholars have reviewed these developments from various points of view, the key point is that, they have all confessed to the Islamic aspiration of these movements and reaffirmed the role of religion in shaping the Arab uprisings. Hoffman and Jamal in their study state that: "There are detailed evidences to suggest that most of the revolutionary's active in the Arab uprisings were motivated, by a psychological attachment to religion" (Hoffman & Jamal: 2013:21). Musa Najafi in his article about the Islamic Awakening Theory, while expressing the Islamic aspiration of these movements, similarly states that: "This social movement is derived from the Islamic identity. Islamic Awakening is a movement that enables different Muslim nations to rebuild their own dignified identity and character." (Najafi, 2012: 12). In a same way, focusing on the fall of western values, Totten and his colleagues argue that: "While the Islamic parties are going to take the power in their countries and the role of Islam in the political sphere of these countries is raising day by day. Even in Tunisia, long considered among the best-educated, liberal and Western-oriented of Arab states, the fate of liberal democracy is unclear" (Totten et al, 2012: 32-3). In another research, Matteo Legrenzi from the University of Venice has studied the future of the region after the Islamic Awakening developments. In his article in the Middle East Political Science Project called International Relations Theory and a Changing Middle East, he has considered the rising role of religion in the regional trends as the

“Progressive Islamization of politics in the regional context” (Legrenzi, 2015: 28).

In another aspect, considering the supranational aspects of these developments, Hamid Salehi in his article reviews the Islamic Awakening and the new regional order, he clarifies that: “New trends in the region show that the Islamic Awakening developments, in addition to the internal dimensions, have international dimensions as well. In other words, the consequences of popular uprisings in the Arab world would not be limited to internal political changes and would affect the international political order as well. Therefore, “these developments have the potentiality to change the global order in the long-term vision” (Salehi, 2012: 80). Considering the lost credibility of the United States in the region, Gamal Selim argues that, the short-lived US democracy-promotion agenda following 9/11 did not result in any meaningful democratization in the Arab world and the fact is that the United States was surprised by the outbreak of mass uprisings in the region. But the U.S policies are bound to generate more anti-American resentment in the region and lead to more future surprises that would challenge American interests in the Arab world. He concludes that: “United States has not grasped yet the social and historical underpinnings of the Arab Spring” (Selim, 2013: 269).

Considering the literature of the issue, it is obvious that the Islamic aspiration of these movements is well argued and accepted by different scholars. In this regard, the present article would try to evaluate the impact of Islamic awakening developments on the international relations. To do so, the conceptual and contextual background of the issue would be briefly reviewed and then, the Islamic awakening effects to the international relations in the structural and functional aspects would be discussed.

## **2. Conceptual and Contextual Background**

### **2-1. Conceptual Framework: The Role of Religion in Politics and International Relations**

In all past civilizations, religion has been an integral and a constitutive element. Religion supplied the ethical basis on which the authority of the state and law was built. As a result, in all past civilizations, there was a very intimate relationship between religion and state, very often so close that one could speak of the union of religion and state. At times, religion tended to dominate the state, and at other times, the state dominated religion. However, something unique in human history, began to take place in Western Christianity, in Christendom: the gradual, painful move toward the separation of religion and state. The conflict over the role of religion seemed to continue over centuries and it was the pitting of Catholics and Protestants against each other that magnified the incipient weariness with the consequences of the union of church and state - induced by the earlier struggle between the pope and civil rulers - to the point of the full embrace of the principle of the separation of religion and state during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. In the Modern era, the 1787

U.S. Constitution gave, for the first time, a formal national articulation of the idea of separation of church and state. From that time, it spread throughout the West in various juridical expressions and, from there, increasingly around the globe (Swindler, 2013: 13-15).

By the rise of new elements in shaping the face of states and international community, it was well argued that there is no room for religion in domestic politics and international relations. But from the midst of 20th century, numerous events has grown the realization among scholars of international relations that religion is an important factor in global politics, these events include the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the September 11 attacks, widespread employment of religious discourse in politics worldwide, the rise of Al-Qaeda on the international scene, and the ethno-religious conflicts such as those in the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and Iraq. The successes of religious political parties and groups across the world ranging from the Christian Democrats in Europe to the Bharatiya Janata Party in India similarly illustrate religion's expanding international profile. There is also a growing recognition of the impact of religion on individual policy-makers and the influence of international religious figures such as the Pope and the Dalai Lama. It is worth to say that, the Iranian Islamic Revolution was likely the earliest widely recognized event which showed religion's influence on contemporary international relations (Sandal & Fox, 2013: 1). Along with those major events that led to the recognition of the role of religion in International relations, other factors including western based globalization and religious concerns, modern communication technologies and also the religious feelings based on the necessity of justice in global politics have added to the extent of religion's role in international relations discourses.

The development of the globalization process based on the western values has caused concerns and distresses about the possibility of a collapse of religious and traditional values between the religious people. Therefore, they have felt the necessity of political participation and movement in their societies. The globalization of economics, politics and human affairs has made individuals and groups more ontologically insecure and existentially uncertain. The past experiences also added more concerns to this matter, because the development and modernization of societies have destructed their traditional and moral lifestyle. Additionally, secularization causes the decline of religion and its organization in societies which in turn is the main reason for identity crisis attributed to religious groups and the concerns regarding these transgression can generate aggressive responses (Kinnvall, 2004: 756). In another aspect, the development of communication technologies have made it easier for religious groups to reflect their concerns and attitudes. Modern communication technologies in the era of globalization, by reducing the spatial and temporal barriers, have made it possible for religious groups to spread their thoughts and ideas much easier. These promotional activities – that sometimes become competitive – can raise the public awareness of religious groups

concerns and may boost adds. Additionally, mass media has provided better background for the development of religious social networks (Ghanbarloo, 2012: 128-9).

Along with globalization and communication developments that have added to the role of religion in international arena, justice has always been a great concern of almost every religion and especially for Islam which considers the presence of justice a key factor in every kind of relationship, ranging from personal to international relations. Therefore, seeking justice has promoted the role of religion in global politics. Pursuit of justice and respect is a natural human desire and has a prominent place in Islamic political thought. The current power politics in the international arena has made justice of immediate relevance for Muslim actors. Whether state or non-state-based, Muslim actors see the odds stacked against them in the international arena and feel aggrieved by the absence of recourse to an impartial arbitrator. This blatant hypocrisy is proof to the Muslim world that justice has no place in global politics; that the US can act above all laws and principles, even those enshrined by US policy-makers; and that this violation of international norms can be carried out without fear of sanctions (Akbarzadeh, 2013:16-17).

One of the major responses concerning the role of religion in the global politics is securitization of the concept of religion in the age of globalization. With the advent of the twenty-first century, renewed interest is given to the intricate, complex and historically rich relation between religion and politics. However, in the context of well-articulated challenges addressed to the theory of secularization – or to the multiple theories of secularization – the observed global resurgence of religious phenomena lead not only to the study of the interaction between church/synagogue/ mosque and state, but it also incorporated many aspects of the presence of religion in the public sphere and in politics (Simon, 2013: 2). Religion and faith have become increasingly ‘securitized’, articulated as one part of a broad-ranging crisis in world order, used to justify increasing military expenditure, offensive defense and pre-emptive action. They have also become the declaratory and public faces of much (although clearly not all) of contemporary political terrorism. In its most extreme and simplistic terms, and some would argue its most dangerous, this securitization becomes a struggle between good and evil in which the pursuit of understanding has given way to stark and often simplistic dualisms that rest on incommensurable differences between ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Elliot, 2006:1).

Considering the different schools of thought, theorists of international relations generally hypothesize the role of religion in four approaches. The first is to work within the classical paradigms, exploring the ways in which religion has sometimes decisively shaped the states system, defined its constitutive units, and animated their interests and outlooks. The second approach, most nearly represented by Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis, holds that religion has become so central that it should supplant existing paradigms and become the main prism for thinking about international politics. The third

approach argues that the role of religion in international relations has risen in recent decades as a form of populist politics in the developing world following the discrediting of secular political ideologies; an approach that some scholars term it as “relational-institutional” theory that draws on both realism and constructivism in thinking about the competitive interplay of discursive frames and transnational networks in an anarchical setting. The fourth and final approach evades definitive commitments to look at more focused hypotheses in which religion is a causal variable. But religion is no longer a causal variable rather a consistent actor of international affairs (Shuriye, 2011: 11).

The thesis of this paper is that religion, although sometimes rejected or denied by western social scientists, remains a force in our modern political scenario especially after the social-political developments in Arab countries which are known as the Islamic awakening or the Arab Spring. This is contrary to the old belief that religion as a primordial factor has no role in the political sphere or in the modern world. Those who have rejected the influence of religion, mainly western political thinkers, focused on western nations, where the influence of religion is not that obvious, and for that they wrongly assumed that the influence of religion on the eastern world will disappear as it picks up with the process of modernization. It seems however, modernity failed to lead to the demise of religion, or replace it; instead, it led to its resurgence not only in the East but also in the West, in a way that after Islamic Awakening developments, formation of new social movements such as the Occupy Wall Street are noteworthy.

The role of religion is to allocate values, through spirituality, promote good life in this world and in the next world, and interpret values through the divine or documented scriptures. Unless it is ignored or rejected religion pursues normative, ethical, ideal and pragmatic approaches. Religion also emphasizes universality, borderlessness and most of times cooperation. Likewise, international relations is a system that attempts, to allocate and define international values through the state interest, political power and moral legitimacy. Many current scholars of international relations are of the opinion that religion has resurged in political influence across the globe, helped by the very forces that were supposed to bury it: democracy, globalization, and technology. Another factor is that, despite the claims of some Western scholars that religion is exclusively irrational and violent; its political influence is fostering democracy, reconciliation, and peace. As an example, Hamas came to power through democratic means (Shuriye, 2011: 12).

Religious movements and narratives can emerge as a protest against dominant political and religious strands. In some contexts, such as Africa and Latin America, movements like liberation theology came into being partly as a response to the domination theology of the colonizers. In parts of Asia, Christianity developed through indigenous communities – in Korea, for example, where the “main aggressor” was Buddhist Japan, Minjung theology (a version of liberation theology) is embedded in the contestation of Japanese

dominance in the nineteenth century (Pieris, 2007: 264). Therefore, religious movements can change norms through their ideational power, which can be more influential than military power. The ideational influence of religious movements over legal frameworks and value systems may also be framed under the “soft power” concept, which intersects with the Neoliberal framework. As Religions do not recognize national borders as natural, the ideational communities created by religious traditions form a transnational network that can complement or override state-based arrangements. In this regard, some scholars use the concept of soft power to argue that transnational actors represent ideas which increasingly shape the values and norms of the international system and religion is a powerful transnational actor which has no specific border and limitation (Sandal & Fox, 2013: 134).

Therefore, in many parts of the world, religion is becoming a mobilizing political force for people; it also works as an instrument for social, economic and political change; as religious based ideologies and movements seek political power through diverse methods. On the definition of religion, it has been argued by number of scholars that Western social scientists have immense problems to define religion, for the obvious reason that, majority of them have so long regarded religion as an alien component in the arena of international studies. Hence, they have failed to comprehend the essence of what constitutes religion (Turner, 1991: 25). As a matter of fact, religion in our present times is associated with globalization. Major religions in the world depict international outlook, they see themselves international, global and influential actor in international society. Indeed the Holy Qur’an advocates Islam as a universal religion; a message which communicates the meaning that Islam is for mankind at large and humanity in its entirety, regardless of time and place. Similar views are held by other universal religions including Christianity. Another aspect of religion is that it is an institution that existed from the emergence of the first man and it seeks to advance and expand without borders (Shuriye, 2011: 12). Therefore, religion should be considered a key factor in international relations studies.

## **2-2. Historical (Contextual) Background: Islamic Awakening Events**

The commonly-accepted starting point of the events so called as the Islamic Awakening, Arab Spring, Arab Revolutions, Arab Uprising, Torat Alkarama and etc. was December 17th, 2011, when Mohammed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian in the small city of Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire. Bouazizi had been attempting to sell produce on the street when he was approached by police officers who accused him of not possessing a permit (presumably, these officers wanted a bribe – this story is not an uncommon one in Tunisia). When some of his goods were confiscated, Bouazizi walked to the governor’s office to file a complaint, but was ignored. He then found a can of gasoline and set himself on fire, shouting “how do you expect me to make a living?” (Hoffman & Jamal, 2014: 595-6). In response to this event, Tunisians began to protest—first in Sidi

Bouzid, then rapidly spreading to other areas of the country. Within a month, most Arab countries had been affected by protests. Protests began in earnest in Egypt on January 25th, and grew in size and intensity until the resignation of longtime president Hosni Mubarak on February 10th. One of the key moments in the Egyptian revolution was the January 28th “day of rage,” where hundreds of thousands of Egyptians marched from mosques to Tahrir Square in order to protest (Lynch, 2012: 91)

Protests have spread across the Arab world, bringing down dictators not only in Tunisia and Egypt, but in Libya and Yemen as well. Most Arab regimes were forced to respond to these protests in one way or another, employing accommodation, repression, or some combination of the two. Although the experiences of various Arab countries during this tumultuous period share many key features, each country possesses unique characteristics.

The following figure shows the fast spread of Islamic awakening events by date which started in Tunisia and quickly affected the whole region.

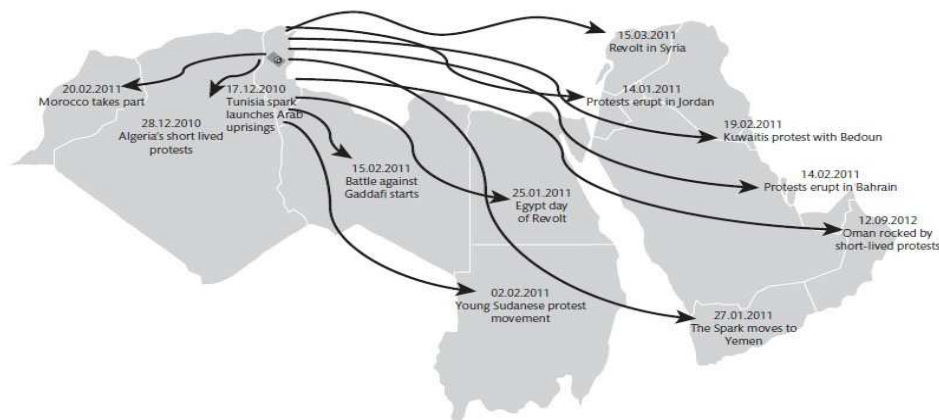


Figure 1: The Spread of Islamic Awakening (Sadiki, 2016: 330)

Although a major goal of the protesters everywhere from Tunisia to Bahrain and Egypt was to create more participatory and representative political systems, a fairer economic system, and independent judiciaries, one of the main characteristics of all these developments was the role of Islam as the catalyst for anti-regime mobilization. Fridays frequently became “days of rage” in Egypt and elsewhere because of the convenience of organizing would-be protesters during Friday prayers (Lynch, 2012: 81, 91). Also, the Islamic notion of *shahada*, meaning both “witness” and “martyr,” belongs in any Arab Spring narrative because of the importance of this concept in motivating anti-regime activity. Likewise, mosques themselves have served as organizational hubs for protest (Benhabib, 2011). Mosques functioned as a locus of anti-government agitation and logistical centers of preparation for demonstrations that could be called the “mosque-to-square” pattern (Ardic, 2012: 38).



After the Islamic Awakening developments, it is now conceivable that religion can motivate protest behavior through either the grievance or opportunity mechanisms. On the one hand, religious engagement might create the opportunity for greater protest. It may reduce the costs of collective action by increasing trust among co-religionists, it may enhance the availability of information among co-religionists, or otherwise serve as an organizational platform for political mobilization (Hoffman & Jamal, 2014: 598). Therefore, during the political development of the Arab States in the region, Islam and religious beliefs had a major role in the organization of people's protest. Every memorial event for the people killed in the former protests became another start for the mass uprising against the longstanding dictatorships along with the disastrous economic, social and political condition of the Arab countries in the region. But the dynamic role of Islam in the developments has its roots in the old Islamic movements of the region.

After the decimation (and in some cases, co-option) of the left opposition by the Arab tyrannies, it was the Islamic parties or networks which gave expression to popular discontent. Often these became powerful, as in Algeria in the 1990s, and were brutally crushed by the faux secular-progressive rulers who obtained international support on the basis of their supposed opposition to Islamic fundamentalism. It was a piquant situation in which former anti-imperialists and left-progressives had turned authoritarian and aligned with the United States-led imperialist bloc while maintaining a facade of secularism and progressivism. On the other hand, during the 1940s and 1950s, the imperial powers used Islamic fundamentalism as a tool when they confronted the anti-colonial and left-wing movements in the Arab world. Many of the authoritarian regimes came to power struggling both against colonialism/imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism. As these regimes changed their character from being liberatory movements to authoritarian governments, Islamic parties and networks often provided voice to growing popular opposition, at times under the garb of an equally faux anti-imperialism (Economic and Political Weekly, 2011: 9). Therefore, the former dictatorships had managed to silence any dissenting voices within civil society by establishing a police state, they had, however, been unable to destroy the decades-long passive resistance of religious movements. Fiercely opposed by Ben Ali in Tunisia, forced into servitude under the Mubarak regime in Egypt, subject to bloody repression during the reign of Gaddafi in Libya, Islamist movements have long been prime targets of authoritarian republics that had imposed a form of secularism by force. Thus, for decades of brutal repression, the Islamists managed to maintain a capacity for mobilizing the population as well as a perfectly structured hierarchy using mosques and "Friday sermons" which allowed them to sustain real networks, in particular through charitable organizations, and thus perpetuate their existence as political-religious movements. It is also this same organizational ability that led Islamist parties to victory at legislative elections following the Arab Spring. For the millions of Muslims who turned out to vote in Tunis, Cairo and Rabat,

these movements – which are far from being uniform, but whose common point is the religious factor as a main unifying force – have embodied the only immediate alternative in the Arab world since then, which will undoubtedly need to build a third track in the longer term. In addition, the extremely high illiteracy rate in certain countries of the region, undoubtedly contributed to the overwhelming vote in favour of Islamists (Sader, 2012: 26).

It is clear that the role of Islam in the Islamic Awakening fits into a wider trend: the public ‘return of religion’ to political significance or even centrality in many countries, not only those in the MENA, which fundamentally goes against earlier expectations that religion would inevitably become a private affair as a central dimension of modernization, implying a wholesale secularization which would, as a result, marginalize religion’s public significance. Today, however, despite earlier near-certainty as to the expected global public marginality of religion, we see empirically that in numerous countries, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, religion performs important social and political roles – while often becoming more controversial, especially in the context of often polarized debates about what influence religion ‘should’ have socially and politically in both modern and modernizing societies.

### **3. Effects on the International Relations**

#### **3-1. Structural Effects**

As mentioned before, the Islamic Awakening developments have posed new challenges to the former structure of power in the region and new elements have complicated its political trends. In this regard, the raising role of soft power including social networks, the formation of new social movements and an evolution in key players along with the more influential role of regional powers should be taken into account.

##### **3-1-1. Formation of New Social Movements**

Regardless of the theoretical debate over the term ‘revolution’, the events that started in Tunisia and spread to other Arab states constituted the first successful attempt in the Arab world to topple authoritarian regimes through popular uprisings. The Arab world witnessed regime changes solely through military coups, mainly during the 1950s and 1960s. And though these changes were depicted as revolutions, the fact of the matter is that they usually represented only a change in the governing elite. The Islamic Awakening has shown that the ‘impossible is possible’ and that even in places where popular protests traditionally have not been tolerated, a bottom-up transformation process can be launched from the streets. Moreover, the dissatisfaction of Arab youths is likely to persist if not adequately addressed by the reform policies of the remaining or newly formed regimes. Yet, demonstrators developed organized structures and a political agenda to participate in decision making (Rozsa et al, 2012: 17). Therefore, unlike the former patterns of power transition in the region that were mainly planned by the western powers and specifically the United States, this time the people’s will had a decisive role. As some scholars have argued, the

power that led the uprisings was “popular will to reformulate the relationship between the people and the state” (Hazran 2012, 116). This opinion coincides with the Henry Kissinger’s point of view that the U.S. foreign policy is not the cause of the events (Kissinger 2012). In addition Jeferey Mankoff claims that “the Arab Spring is not a Western-led plot” (Mankoff, 2012, 263).

Considering people’s will for self-determination, Yemen can be a very important and appropriate example. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned and his successor Abdal-Rabah Mansour Al-Hadi formally replaced him in February 2012. Still protests continue for self-determination and equality for the majority of the Yemeni population. Yemenis considered Al-Hadi as the representative of Saudi Arabia, not their own selected president. Therefore, rejection of foreign influence resulted in the continuing protests against him. Although, the civil protests of people changed to a full fledge war because of Saudi Arabia’s aggressive intervention, but Yemeni people proved their will for self-determination and opposition to the long intervention of such powers.

### **3-1-2. Nature of Power: Soft Power**

While each age has its revolutions, each revolution has its methods and vocabulary. In the case of Islamic Awakening, we are confronted by peaceful revolts that operate through soft power, not hard power, as was especially the case in Tunisia and Egypt. The use of soft power vehicles such as the digital media has proved that soft power can be stronger than security regimes and their intelligence apparatuses. In this regard, the role of social media is of great importance for the formation of movements inside the Arab World. Information and communication technology, including social networks such as Facebook, YouTube or Twitter, those “weapons of mass subversion” that make each protester a real photojournalist capable of bypassing censorship and denouncing repression, the urbanized elite youth open to globalization have undoubtedly been a great vehicle for the Arab revolutions (Sader, 2012: 25). Digital media were powerful in getting out protest messages, in driving the coverage by mainstream broadcasters, in connecting frustrated citizens, and in helping them realize that they shared grievances and could act together to do something about their situation (Howard & Hussain, 2013: 24). Social media was used heavily to conduct political conversations by a key demographic group in the revolution – young, urban, relatively well educated individuals, many of whom were women. Both before and during the revolutions, these individuals used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to put pressure on their governments. In some cases, they used new technologies in creative ways such as in Tunisia where democracy advocates embarrassed President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali by streaming video of his wife using a government jet to make expensive shopping trips to Europe. Bloggers also used the Internet to publish information critical of the governments in Egypt and Tunisia (Howard et al, 2011: 1). Before social media, it was very hard for people in the Arab world to hear each other as the news media outlets were controlled by the respective governments. But with the

advent of digital media, it was possible to mainstream and broadcast everything that was going on in an instant. With so many of the youth surfing the web, they turned to the internet to express their rage and dissatisfaction with the problems they faced each day, such as unemployment, rigid economic conditions and government corruption. They have utilized the internet to rally the populace to their cause.

Twitter offers us the clearest evidence of where individuals engaging in democratic conversations were located during the revolutions. There were over 2,200 tweets from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, and Yemen about Ben Ali's resignation on the day he stepped aside. Over the course of a week before Mubarak's resignation, the total rate of tweets from Egypt—and around the world—about political change in that country ballooned from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day. Interestingly, the relative contribution of people not living in the region diminished significantly over this period. On the day Mubarak left office, February 11, there were more than 225,000 Tweets outside the country that spread the news of his departure. In the two weeks after Mubarak's resignation, there were an average of 3,400 tweets a day about the political crisis in Egypt by people living in neighboring countries (Howard et al, 2011: 3). However, the awakening of Islamic religious identities and increasing cultural polarization that associated Arab spring tend to complicate rather than facilitate soft power practice. As mentioned before, revolutions and the rise of political Islamic parties led to increasing assertions on cultural uniqueness and rejecting what is perceived as 'threatening' influences of western cultures (Mouawad, 2013: 17).

### **3-1-3. Type and Nature of Actors: Region as a Major Player**

Considering the role of external powers specifically the United States, as people-power with an Islamic face swept away regime after regime in the MENA region, it posed direct, real time challenges to U.S. interests and traditional American policies relying on "authoritarian stability" and Israeli military preponderance have come under serious strain (Gause & Lustick, 2012: 1). Also facilitating the shift towards a multi-polar Middle East has been the shift in global context, both before and after the Arab Spring. A combination of military overstretch after both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, an economic slump and a revived isolationism in domestic politics were clear signals that the U.S. position was already weakening in the Middle East. And the Arab Springs have exacerbated this, costing the U.S. one major regional key ally, Hosni Mubarak, and deeply unnerving another, Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the diplomatic hegemony the US enjoyed in the 1990s and the military hegemony it attempted in the 2000s looks unlikely to be a feature of the post-Arab spring world. Nor is it viewed as a model to emulate by the peoples of the region who are turning more and more towards Asia for education, travel, economic and commercial relations (Patte, 2012: 2).

On the other hand, these political developments caused a raise in the influential role of region itself which is a great challenge for the international system and the great powers who previously had the upper hand in the trends of the region. 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. This search for a new order synthesizes 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 (Duran & Yilmaz, 2013: 141). Therefore, the developments of the Arab Spring have led all the players to use national power to enhance their regional role, whether to contain threats or expand influence. Thus, the Arab Spring has further complicated the regional balance of power. In such circumstances, regional solutions in which the dynamics of states’ internal politics as well as the interests of regional and trans-regional actors are simultaneously considered, have become more useful for solving the regional issues such as the Syrian crisis. Another aspect is that, the Arab Spring can be seen as a turning point in the regional balance of power of the Middle East. Previously, the “balance of power” was determined at the level of classic players—the states—and therefore was easier. However, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the roles of states are now combined with the “dynamics of internal politics”—making them much more complicated. From the outset of the Arab Spring, the domestic socio-political issues of the Arab countries—democratization, political reform, Islamization, elimination of authoritarianism, establishment of a market economy and middle class, and human rights issues have become the priorities in these countries. This development has impacted the objectives of the regional players in the context of balance of power. In these new circumstances, each of the regional players seeks to restrain threats and enhance its influence (Barzegar, 2012). For example, Saudi Arabia was stunned by the fall of Mubarak, its most important Arab ally, and blamed the United States for not doing enough to keep him in power. When popular mobilization in the neighboring kingdom of Bahrain seemed to be pushing the king and his crown prince toward some kind of compromise with the opposition, Saudi troops entered the country to support the harder-line faction of the ruling family and back the Bahraini armed forces’ suppression of the demonstrations (Gause & Lustick, 2012: 9). Contrary to this, the 1979 Iranian Islamic 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 (Duran & Yilmaz, 2013: 143). On the other side, Turkey tried to introduce itself as a role model for the social, political and economic developments of new regimes. But like the Saudi Arabia, while trying to overthrow the legitimate government of Syria,

cooperated with the terrorist groups. A research team in Columbia University's Program on Peace-building and Rights revealed a report 'drawing on a variety of international sources — The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, BBC, Sky News, as well as Turkish sources, CNN Turk, Hurriyet Daily News, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, and Radikal among others which indicate Turkey's involvement in supporting militant groups against the Syrian regime including Al Nusra front and ISIS' (Philips, 2014). As a result, region itself became a key player from the outset of these developments and the regional policies of regional 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 regional order (Duran & Yilmaz, 2013: 163).

### **3-2. Functional Effects**

As stated before, Islamic Awakening has influenced decision-making process in international relations. Demanding that instead of the major effectiveness of the international system, people can preserve their right for self-determination and also great powers intervention to be decreased into a minimum. In this regard, opposition to the forceful and imported democratization of region, promising to global movements and the creation of a global awakening and also a revival of reformist approach in international relations can be considered as the most significant effects of Islamic Awakening developments. Therefore, these elements would be discussed in the following.

#### **3-2-1. Process of Decision-Making: Opposition to the Western Democratization of the Region**

In the early 1990s, the United States began emphasizing civil society developments in the Middle East. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the George W. Bush administration significantly increased American assistance to the region. By fiscal year 2009, the level of annual U.S. democracy aid in the Middle East was more than the total amount spent from 1991 to 2001. This forceful democratization of MENA region was basically shaped on a top-down approach. The top-down approach involved putting rhetorical and diplomatic pressure on regimes to reform and can go so far as to involve direct American military engagement installing democratic government, as was the case in Iraq following the 2003 invasion. The U.S. government also pursued an apparently bottom-up approach by funding international organizations that help strengthen the bases for gradual democratic transition (the rule of law, accountable government institutions and expanded political competition) in the MENA region by offering technical assistance and training to political parties and electoral management bodies, engaging with civil society, producing assessments and polls, and promoting female political participation. (Diamond,

2008: 338). But while these efforts were categorized as democracy aid, it wasn't necessarily meant to promote democracy. Democracy entails 'alternation of power,' but most NGOs that received Western assistance avoided anything that could be construed as supporting a change in regime. The reason was simple. The United States and other Western powers supported 'reform,' but they were not interested in overturning an order which had given them pliant, if illegitimate, Arab regimes. Those regimes became part of a comfortable strategic arrangement that secured Western interests in the region, including a forward military posture, access to energy resources and security for the state of Israel. Consequently, the regimes themselves dutifully created the appearance of reform, rather than its substance. Democratization was 'defensive' and 'managed.' It was not meant to lead to democracy but rather to prevent its emergence (Hamid, 2011).

In this process, Arabs were asked to be patient, and to wait. In order to move toward democracy, they would first have to build a secular middle class, reach a certain level of economic growth, and, somehow, foster a democratic culture. But it was never quite explained how a democratic culture could emerge under dictatorship. In this regard, Islamic Awakening developments proved the fact that imported democracy cannot be the ultimate solution for the region and it's not the appropriate alternative for the current situation. Therefore, many have argued that the Egyptian Tahrir revolution and the spread of such movements to the whole Arab world is Islam's response to Western modernity and an alternative for forceful democratization of region by the Western powers (Dallmayr, 2011: 640). Consequently, the Islamic Awakening developments proved the fact that, the promotion of democracy in the region does not have to focus on an imported Western, inappropriate, model of political, economic, and social order.

### **3-2-2. Formation of Global Awakening**

In another aspect, the 2008 financial crisis in stunned people but initially brought little protest. Financial institutions had reaped fantastic profits. Their executives had been paid fantastic bonuses. And when the financial house of cards they devised tumbled, governments stepped in to bail them out with public money. Some firms used the public funds to pay another round of enormous bonuses even while many ordinary Americans lost their jobs or their homes or were threatened with layoffs and foreclosures. There were certainly howls of unhappiness, Republicans and Democrats sniped at each other over who had the better response, but there was little in the way of concerted collective action. But soon after the Islamic Awakening developments in the Arab world, a new protest movement was created against these corruptions and was named the Occupy Wall Street movement. The main issues raised by Occupy Wall Street movement were social and economic inequality, greed, corruption and the perceived undue influence of corporations on government—

particularly from the financial services sector. The OWS slogan, "We are the 99%", refers to income inequality and wealth distribution in the U.S. between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of the population. To achieve their goals, protesters acted on consensus-based decisions made in general assemblies which emphasized direct action over petitioning authorities for redress (Calhoun, 2013: 26-27).

From its inception in September 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement has been linked to the revolutions and popular uprisings throughout North Africa and the Middle East that have gone under the name of the Arab Spring. This connection is reflected in the official OWS website, which declares: "We are using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants." (Alessandrini, 2012). This linked the protests to those in the Arab world. In Cairo's Tahrir Square most famously, but also in Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Bahrain and elsewhere. From the end of 2010, images of Arabs gathering to demand the chance to participate in their societies fully and with dignity spread globally, sparking protests as far afield as China, and mixing with European examples to influence the beginning of OWS (Calhoun, 2013: 28). Visual media shared images of urban occupations that brought inspiration and circulated tactical ideas. It proved that there was a world-wide wave of protests against corruption, economic inequality, greed and public injustice. Consequently, some kind of Global Awakening was shaped and affected the economic heart of United States as well as other western powers.

### **3-2-3. the Revival of Reformist Approach in International Relations**

In addition to the mentioned effects of Islamic Awakening on the functions of the international system, it seems that Islamic nature of these developments have paved the way for the revival of the reformist approach in international relations. It should be noted that the roots of this reformist discourse go deep into Islam's early history, when a rationalist school battled with a literalist reading of the faith. The next flourishing of reformist discourse in Islam dates from the mid-nineteenth century. The impetus was the European advance into the Muslim world and Muslims' encounter with modernity. This advance showed Muslims how far they had moved away from their early achievements and generated soul-searching among them about the causes of their decline and how to reverse it. A main conundrum was how Muslims can modernize without totally losing their own identity and culture (Hunter, 2014: 7).

From the theoretical point of view, Robert L. Rothstein, based on the states' approach to the international system categorizes them to conservative, reformist and revolutionary (Rothstein, 1968). John Sutton defines reformist states as the state that wish (or whose dominant leaders desire) to reform existing economic, social, political and cultural arrangements, without changing them



fundamentally (Sutton, 1987: 618). Regarding the religious movements' approach, although religious movements can complement existing state-based arrangements without necessarily challenging them, not all religious movements are willing to be "accommodated" in the existing system. Therefore, the existence of revisionist religious movements that foresee alternative world orders is a challenge to the current system and international society perspectives. Islamic groups have been among the most active networks to express views of an alternative world order and to implement these visions. Expressing an alternative world order does not require violence, but it is a clear challenge to the world order put forward by the international relation theories specially the English School (Sandal & Fox, 2013: 135). In this way, the failure of dependency on major powers and the ineffectiveness of secular approaches, ones again flourished in the Islamic Awakening developments and inspired the revival of the reformist approach in international relations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The study of multidimensional developments in the MENA region and specially the key Islamic-Arabic countries shows that beside the fundamental effects of these developments on the domestic affairs and equitation of those countries, Islamic Awakening has paved the way for the resurgence of the reformist approach in international relations. In this regard, the key factors included are the nature of power, nature and number of actors and the response of international system to the regional inputs.

Concerning the nature of power, as mentioned before, the Islamic Awakening developments were bounded with the ideational power of religion. This ideational influence of religious over legal frameworks and value systems that can be framed under the soft power concept, could overthrow the long lasting dictatorships of the region. While the Arab uprisings are believed to be reflective of broader Islamic trends in the region as a continuation of the Islamic revolution in Iran, people have come to realize that they had the power to oust tyrants nonviolently. The Islamic Awakening has broken through a barrier; suddenly the field of possibilities has expanded. Therefore, people have gained a unique opportunity to reclaim their identity and to reconcile themselves with their memory.

Another result of the Islamic Awakening developments was the recognition of the region as a key player. This is an issue that was not accepted by the international system. Before these developments, key decisions for the future of region instead of being made by the regional actors themselves, was imposed by the international system. Therefore, it can be said that Islamic Awakening like the Iranian Islamic Revolution rejected the plans of external powers and proved the decisive role of people as well as region itself. As a result, the international system came to the conclusion that the inputs of regions should be enumerated much more seriously and consequently, the number of actors involved in regional affairs was increased to some kind of pluralistic manner.

Considering the mentioned factors, the authors believe that, Islamic Awakening developments have caused a reformist evolution to the international system. In a sense that, Although there was no fundamental change in the intellectual foundations nor any significant change in the structure of the international system, Islamic Awakening developments lead to revise the decision-making processes in international relations.

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