



## Al Jazeera Forum: Ahmet Davutoglu

Turkey's foreign minister talks about how the region has rediscovered its sense of possessing a common destiny.

Last Modified: 13 Mar 2011 14:28

Has the future arrived? Let me answer in advance. Yes, the future has arrived. In fact, the future has delayed. We have to understand first how we should explain the events going on around us. Here, in all of my analysis, I would like to share my views as an intellectual from this region rather than as a minister of the republic of Turkey. Of course, I am proud of being a minister, but I want to discuss things from the perspective of an intellectual feeling a sense of belonging to this region.

Let me start with method of thought. How should we understand this? Then I will focus on the matters of action, how we should react to this transformation, how should we respond. And then, I will come to the future, original vision for all of us. About the connection between past and future, we have to understand how to approach first. First of all, all the things around us, the events around us today are normal issues. Of course, they develop spontaneously, but we have to see them as natural reflections of the natural flow of history. We are going through a natural flow of history. Why? Because there was a need for change. In fact, what we are trying to do today in this forum is a reassessment of the last century.

There were two abnormalities in the last century in our region. The first abnormality was colonialism. And the second abnormality was the Cold War, which divided the societies, the countries, which divided our region. The first abnormality, colonialism, in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, divided the region into colonial entities and separated the natural links between tribes and communities. For example, Syria was a French colony, while Iraq was a British colony. The link between Damascus and Baghdad, the historical link, was cut off. The economic links were cut.

The second abnormality was the Cold War. The countries were divided because of the Cold War - South Yemen, North Yemen. Those countries who lived together for centuries became enemies to each other, like Turkey and Syria. We were in NATO. Syria was pro-Soviet. Our border became not the border of two nation states, but the border of two blocs. Now it is time to naturalise the flow of history. I see all these processes as a delayed process. We should have lived this process in 1990s like eastern Europeans, but some people - I don't want to specify those people those people - or some countries said that Arab societies do not deserve democracies. They deserve authoritarian regimes in order to keep the status quo. In order, at that time in the 1990s, to prevent radicalisation or Islamic radicalism or

others. Some countries and some leaders who were proud of their democracy, they told that democracy may bring certain risks and certain potential risks of insecurity in our region. Now we are saying all together, no. An ordinary Turkish, an ordinary Arab, an ordinary Tunisian can change history. And we believe that democracy is something good. Our masses deserve democracy more than anyone else. This is a paradigmatic shift. This is a natural flow of history. Everybody must respect this will of the people.

If we understand this natural flow of history, that there is a need to reconnect societies, communities, tribes, ethnicities, sects in our region, they will lose the momentum of the history. Those who understand correctly, they will be the leading force of the history.

What is the future if this is the past? The past was the abnormality. The present change is a natural flow of the history and our future is our sense of common destiny. All of us, we have the common destiny. Therefore, this sense of common destiny which emerged in our region is the main potential for our future. We realise this common destiny when Prime Minister Erdogan reacted to the Israeli attacks against Gaza in Davos. As Turkey, we realised how that sense of common destiny could be visible in these situations. Or when the civilian convoy was attacked by Israeli soldiers. These were some indications from our perspective, but today because of this telecommunication revolution - and Al Jazeera is one of the forces behind this telecommunication revolution in the Arab World - the sense of common destiny is everywhere. Nobody can ignore this common destiny.

Now, if this transformation is a natural flow of history, then how should we respond? What could be the basic principles or the basic reference points to respond to this new transformation? At the beginning, it was said that it was like a political tsunami. If it was a political tsunami, what we are facing today, then we have the same action plan like we are reacting to a tsunami or earthquake in Japan today in 1999 in Turkey. First the emergency plan: to save lives of the people, to prevent any disaster. Second, normalisation of life. Third, reconstruction and restoration of political systems in our region. Like restoring and rebuilding the buildings or restoration of the cities.

But in order to make that restoration you have to have a city plan in your mind. You have to have a vision in your mind. And you have to have the self-confidence that you can rebuild your city. You can rebuild your house. It is our house. We will be the rebuilders of our house. And for that what are the basic principles we have to follow?

The first psychological principle is self-confidence. Today, what the masses in our Arab world, in our region - not the Arab world, in Turkey as well, everywhere in our region - want is respect and dignity. I was in a meeting with the European ministers yesterday in Hungary and I came here from Hungary last night. In that meeting, I talked to the ministers what an ordinary Egyptian young person or Arab intellectual today wants, is not money or some luxury or using theatre in a luxury term. But what they want is dignity. That is the critical term, that is the critical concept today: dignity.

For decades we have been insulted. For decades we have been humiliated for different reasons. Now what we want is dignity. What young people in Tahrir requested or what Bouazizi in Tunisia requested was dignity. This is the return of an ordinary Arab to the history and we have to respect. We have to respect and we have to understand this.

I had a chance to go to Egypt last week - ten days ago - with President Gul. We had meetings with all of the leaders. The transitional military authority leaders including Tantawi and with political leaders, but the most interesting and the most important meeting was our meeting with the youth leaders. I still remember the names of those who participated - Mostafa Naggar, Abdul Rahman Samir, Dalia Hussein. I think Islam Shalaby will be speaking here.

Now after listening to them, I became much more optimistic and much more visionary of the future. That generation is the future of Egypt. They will decide whether history has arrived or not. In fact, they have already decided. They were decisive. They have already decided. They know what they want. And what they want is one simple thing: dignity. And I salute those young leaders. They are our future and we have to listen to them carefully in order to plan for the future. They are the ones who will specify the future of our region, the future of our nations. In the next century if we will be having a real centre of a rising region, these young leaders will specify what will be going on in the future. Therefore, we are today much more optimistic. We don't want a silent youth. We want an active youth. We want a critical youth. They should criticise us and we should be passionate to listen to them because we are working for their future. Not for our future. Therefore, this is a new momentum in our region. It is like 1968 in Europe from that perspective. Or it is like late 1960s in Eastern Europe. If those youth movements were respected, these youth movements should be respected as well.

The second principle is a political principle, let me say. Change and transformation as a sociological necessity. When I was in Tunisia, I had meetings with the leaders of several political groups and I addressed them, I told them, you are the grandsons of Ibn Khaldun. The grandsons of Ibn Khaldun deserve the best political administration. And the grandson of Ibn Khaldun - and the students of Ibn Khaldun like us - we should know that change and transformation is a necessity, not a choice. If history flows and you are trying to resist against the history, then you will be losing. No leader, no charismatic leader can stop the flow of history. Now it is time for change. Nobody should try to keep the old logic of the Cold War. Nobody should give an impression that specific regime or that person should be the only guarantee for the stability of the country. The guarantee for the stability of the country is the people itself.

And, as His Excellency, President Gul mentioned, no leadership thinks that he will be there forever. We should trust our nation, we should not trust us. We are one citizen of the nation rather than the nation itself. If somebody thinks that the sustainability of this state, the future of the nation is in the hand of only one person then it means that that one person does not trust the nation, does not trust the collective vision of the nation, collective rationality of the nation. Or

in Islamic terms ijma of the nation.

Therefore, when there is a time of change, leaders should respect that. Even to lead this change as President Gul did - and a lady now is a president, we have a lady president in Brazil. Instead of resisting against change, we have to understand the logic of the change and to lead the change. How, what should be the methodology of the change? It should not be a violent change. In this region, we are fed up of civil wars, tensions, fragile status of these states. All of us, we have to act wisely without creating a violence, a civil war or a tension between brothers. We have to make this change possible with the same spirit of common destiny.

Third, political principals. Here, I will give some other principles under political, not just one principle. The first and foremost political principle of this transformation should be balance between security and freedom. When our government came to power in 2002, in one of the first speeches of Prime Minister Erdogan - and later we made it the basic principle of our political philosophy - that the objective of our government would be balance between security and freedom. Throughout the human history, human beings looked for two main objectives, tried to maintain two main objectives - security and freedom. That is the basis for political legitimacy. We cannot ignore security for freedom or freedom for security. If we sacrifice security for freedom, we will have chaos. But if we sacrifice freedom for security, then we will have autocratic regimes or regimes where an individual will not have basic human rights.

The ultimate political [goal] could be achieved only if political regimes or a government or a state guarantees to the people that security and state could be achievable together. Security and freedom could be achievable together. They are not alternative to each other. In Turkey for many decades, we were told that it is better to have less freedom in order to protect our national security. We said no. We don't want to sacrifice from our freedom in order for our security. In fact, the opposite: if you have more freedom, nation and state will be more secure because there will be a strong link between state and individual citizens. If state thinks that citizens are threats, it means the end of the state. Therefore, in Turkey, we have eliminated the concept of domestic threats. Citizens cannot be threat to state. State, even if there is a treat, state should not assume that citizens could be a threat.

Secondly, we develop zero problems with our neighbours in order to eliminate external threats. If every day you feel a threat from domestic or foreign parameters, you will not be relaxed. Every day you will be thinking, how should we react to this threat? It is better to have a vision rather than trying to react to the crisis. Therefore, in all these brother nations, the new administrations should try to keep a balance between security and freedom.

Second, what do we want to achieve through politics? Politics is an instrument. It is not the objective, it is not the aim. Politics is the instrument. Your objective is happiness of the nation like al-Farabi said Al-Medina al-Fadila. So then the values of politics is more important than the power of politics. Power could vaporise, but values should be there forever. What are these values? Transparency, accountability, rule of law, representation. These are the values we have to make reality in political life. The power, as I said, could change, but the values should be there forever. And we should not think that these values are alien to Muslim societies. No. Whenever we read Omar Radhallaham's life, we always say he is the man who established Islamic law, rule of law - transparency, accountability, all are there. These are human values. These are our values, as well. So democratisation in Muslim societies or making reference to these values is not an alienation. It is the human values. We have to respect all.

Third, social, political institutions of societies should not be weakened or destroyed through this process. Institutions, social institutions, state institutions should be protected. Revolution does not mean destruction. If we lose this sense of continuity, we will lose the cause. Therefore the Egyptian case is a good example. Egyptian army acted very wisely not to confront people because Egyptian army had a tradition and we all suggested the same - in all the meetings that this transitions should be given to an institution rather than to one person. But same way the strongest army in the world is the army who does not involve politics. If you look at the tragedies in the past, if there is no clear cut separation between military and civilian role of the political institutions, you may face problems. Therefore during our visit to Egypt, we were impressed by Tantawi's approach that he is decisive to deliver this power to the civilian authority as well as possible.

We, in Turkey, we had many experiences in these transitional periods. That transfer should be a clear transfer to the civilian politicians as early as possible. But at the same time, the continuity of state institution should be there. In Iraq, we had many challenges. Why? Because the state institutions, almost all of them, they were either abolished or weakened during the war in Iraq, the war against Iraq in fact. So now this transition should be in such a way that state institutions should be protected and we have to help all those who are trying to have this transitional and orderly transition. What we understand from an orderly transition is this.

Fourth, important political principles should be legal status of states and the territory should not be changed. In our region, we have enough division. We don't want to have new divided countries or fragile states. In fact, what we need today is not division, more unification. More unity. Today, the challenge in Libya is there. In Yemen, we have to be very careful that this transition will be in such a form that the state should not be divided again. During colonialism and during the Cold War, we had enough divisions, enough separations. Change must be there without new divisions or creating new fronts in our region. We want stronger states and we believe that after this transformation, states in our region will not be weakened, will be stronger because these states will have new relationships with their citizens.

Fifth political principle, there should not be foreign intervention to lead the process. The process should be led by the people of each country. They should decide their own future. This natural transformation should be led by the real forces on the ground, representing the will of the people. Any image of foreign intervention will complicate this situation in our societies, but those who are living in these countries, they should show wisdom, vision for their own

future and they should lead this process. There are common characteristics in our region, but there are also specific characteristics of each country and we should try to help or to contribute to this process considering these special characteristics.

Sixth principle, there should be regional ownership. No foreign intervention, but regional ownership is different. This is our region. Intellectuals, opinion makers, politicians of this region should come together more frequently in order to decide what should be happening in our region in the future. We are linked to each other for centuries. Therefore, whatever happens in Egypt, in Libya, in Yemen, in Iraq, in Lebanon affects us all. Therefore, we should show solidarity with the people of these brotherly countries. There should be more regional forum, not only meeting between the leaders of political affairs or ministers. There should be more meetings, more opportunities like today, more occasions among the intellectuals of our region, among the media of our region.

If these are the principles - self-confidence as a psychology principle, change and transformation as a sociological principle, balance between security and freedom, transparency, accountability, rule of law, continuity of social and political institutions, protecting the territorial integrity of our countries. If these are the principles for how to respond to this transformation then what is the long term strategy - the vision for our region? When Middle East as a concept is being used in international forum, the reference will usually be there - tensions, conflicts, Middle Eastern tensions, Middle Eastern conflicts, underdevelopment etcetera. In fact, this is not true.

This is a typical orientalism. Our region has been the centre of civilizations for not decades, not centuries, for millenniums. No city in our region has a history less than 2,000 years. We had a strong civilisational backgrounds. When there was political authorities or political systems in our region, there was not even village and town in some parts of Europe. We have a strong civilisational background in the sense of the formation of political system, political thought, political philosophy. We have strong economic resources. If today, there is no use of natural resources of the Middle East, world economy would collapse. And we have a strong experience of multicultural life experience in our region so we have all the potentials of political and economic background.

Now, it is time to make historic reassessments in order to transform our region, a region of stability, freedom, prosperity, cultural revival, and civilisational coexistence. And it is in our hand. As I said, with all these transformations, the ordinary Egyptians, ordinary Tunisians, ordinary Libyan citizen wants to be an actor in history. They want to contribute to the flow of history and they have the right to do so. And, in this new region, there should be less violence, no violence. There should be less barriers between countries, between societies, between sects.

There should be more economic interdependency, more political dialogue, more dialogue between intellectuals. There should be a common zone of security and respect for each other. This goal is achievable. If we discuss this vision and agree on a common understanding of a new vision in our region, Middle East will be the centre of the world economy, world politics and world culture - global culture - in the future.

As President Lula mentioned, today there is a search for a new global order. UN system must change. After the international financial crisis, we need to develop a new economic order based on justice. We need to have a new social order, based on respect. And this region - what they call the Middle East, I don't want to use that term as an orientalist term - our region can contribute more to the formation of new emerging global, political, economy and culture order.

Those who are now leading the process in their countries - these young leaders - they will be saying and contributing more to the emergence of a new global order and they have the power to do so. Our responsibility is to open the way for this new generation and to have a new region in the next decade so that the 21st century will be specified by the forces of our region and with the will of the people of our region.

Source: Al Jazeera

Hide Comments