

Turkey's Changing Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring

Fahrettin Sümer

American University of Iraq
Sulaimani (AUIS)
KRG, Iraq

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ABSTRACT

This paper inquires about Turkey's foreign policy towards its neighbors in the recent decade as related to the Arab Spring. The Turkish government, under the Justice and Development Party, has followed an "idealistic" foreign policy called "zero problems with neighbors" as an important component of its "strategic depth" approach to Turkey's foreign policy. Hence, it has improved relations with almost all its neighbors, excluding some remaining issues with Armenia, Cyprus (Greek), and Greece. An outcome of this policy was that Assad's government in Syria and the Turkish government signed multilevel cooperation agreements and held joint cabinet meetings. Until the arrival of the Arab Spring, the two countries' relations were becoming closer. In 2011, Turkey gradually started to promote change in the Middle East, and supported oppositions against the authoritarian regimes of Tunisia and Egypt, and then against Qaddafi and finally against the Syrian regime. The Turkish government, based on its good relations with the Syrian government, first tried to persuade/push Assad to start a comprehensive reform program, accommodating the demands of the opposition. After Assad's resistance to such reforms, the relations between the two governments deteriorated quickly. The crisis has also become a subject of interstate rivalry among regional powers, including Turkey. The Syrian crisis created a bigger challenge for Turkish foreign policy because its relations with Iran and Russia, which supported the Assad regime, were negatively affected by the crisis. In addition, the main opposition party in Turkey heavily criticized the government's foreign policy approach, as it saw Turkey's involvement in the Syrian crisis as a foreign policy failure. This paper discusses the domestic and international causes of Turkey's foreign policy approach and how the Arab Spring and subsequent Syrian crisis affected Turkish foreign policy toward the region.

Keywords: Turkey's foreign policy, strategic depth, zero problem with neighbors, the Arab Spring, and the Syrian crisis

Phases of Modern Turkey's Foreign Policy: 1923-2002

Early Decades

Turkey emerged on the remnants of the Ottoman Empire as a nation state at the end of WW I. After heavy territorial losses in the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, WW I brought the end of the Ottoman Empire. In August 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres with harsh conditions was imposed on the Sultan. The treaty partitioned the remaining Ottoman territories that correspond to today's Turkey, leaving only minor parts of Anatolia, and took Turkey's sovereign rights over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. It was seen as the culmination of the Eastern question, concerning the division of the ailing Ottoman Empire. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, a former Ottoman general, who later took the last name Atatürk, resistance movements in Anatolia were

organized and an independence war that led to the emergence of modern Turkey was fought until 1922. As a result, the Treaty of Sèvres was never implemented. Instead, the new Turkey's gains were recognized with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923 (For more information and details see Ahmad, 2004 and Jung, 2003). "Even after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the Turks had to struggle hard to stop the European powers from treating the new state as they had the former Ottoman Empire" (Ahmad, 2004: 18).

Following the Independence War, Atatürk started a reform project that can be characterized as "modernization through westernization" imposed on the newly defined nation with a strong emphasis on Turkish identity, and in later decades on secularism. The Ottoman monarchy and the Islamic Caliphate were abolished, the Ottoman use of the Arabic alphabet was changed in favor of the Latin alphabet, and western clothes were imposed on men, and strongly suggested for women to wear. The reforms continued in the 1920s and the 1930s, and all oppositions to the regime were suppressed. During these decades, the founders of modern Turkey focused on consolidation of the new regime and building the economy. Affected by the catastrophes of the Balkan wars and WW I, and the subsequent Treaty of Sèvres, the founders followed a very cautious and security-prioritizing foreign policy. They were suspicious of the intentions of the European colonial powers. In fact, Sèvres created a "syndrome" that can be characterized by a deep-seated suspicion of foreign powers and the perception of being encircled by enemies. It affected the foreign policy making elite's attitude deeply for many decades (Hale, 2002: 13; Jung, 2003:1, 4).

Until the end of WW II, the Turkish elite preferred a low level of international involvement and neutrality when possible (Turan, 2011: 1). During the independence war, they sought the support of the new Soviet Union against European colonial powers, in particular Britain and France. The Turko-Soviet Treaty of Friendship of December 1925 established the basis of this relationship. The friendship that started in the early 1920s continued until August 1939 when the Soviet Union signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact (see Ahmad, 2004: 15-17 for details of Turkey-Soviet rapprochement).

In 1931, Atatürk coined an idealist slogan of "peace at home, peace in the world." This policy implied avoidance of external involvements and rejection of a pan-Turkist movement for political union with Turkish-speaking peoples of Caucasus and Central Asia (Murinson, 2006: 946). Even though the focus of the new state was internal, external relations with nearby countries as far as Afghanistan were also developed. Therefore, Turkey's foreign policy was based on pragmatism rather than sentimentality, and was not isolationist, but at that point, "the goal was to end the isolation imposed upon the new Turkey by the West after the end of the First World War" (Ahmad, 2004: 18).

Starting from the late 1920s, Turkey faced an Italian threat, as Mussolini, Italy's fascist dictator, expressed his dream of restoring the Roman Empire in Asia and Africa, turning the Mediterranean into an Italian lake. The Turkish foreign policy elite took Mussolini's posturing seriously, since just about two decade ago the Ottomans lost Libya to Italy, Italy was part of the Treaty of Sevres' partition plans in Anatolia, and the Dodecanese Islands off the coast of Anatolia, which were occupied by Italy in 1912, were still under Italy's control. On May 30,

1928, Turkey and Italy signed an agreement with which they promised mutually to remain neutral in case of a conflict and to settle any dispute between the two through arbitration.

However, during the same period, Turkey also sought to improve relations with Western powers, in particular Britain and France, against the rising fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany in the 1930s. Turkey's Grand National Assembly ratified the Briand-Kellogg Pact, which was signed by the United States and France in January 1929, renouncing war as an instrument of foreign policy. In June 1930 Turkey and Greece settled their remaining issues left over from Lausanne and cleared the way for friendly relations in June 1930 (Ahmad, 2004: 19-22). In addition, the Turkish government welcomed the British Mediterranean fleet in October 1929 and started the process of reconciliation with London. This relationship grew into an alliance in 1939. Turkey also joined a commission of inquiry into the European Union. Moreover, Turkey supported "collective security" and therefore backed the League of Nations' sanctions against Italy. Britain and France were bitterly criticized by the Turkish press when they left Ethiopia to Mussolini with the Hoare-Laval Pact of December 1935 (Ahmad, 2004: 20).

One of the important foreign policy successes of Turkey during the Atatürk period was the signing of the Montreux Convention regarding the regime of the straits in July 1936 (going into effect in November 1936). This was an outcome of Turkey's improved relations with the anti-fascist Western powers. The agreement, which is still in force, gives Turkey full control over the Bosphorus Straits and the Dardanelles and regulates the transit of naval warships, guaranteeing the free passage of civilian vessels in peacetime. Atatürk died in November 1938. As mentioned earlier, Ankara-Moscow relations "cooled after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939. In October 1939, during Turkish Foreign Minister Sükrü Saraçoğlu's visit to Moscow, Stalin proposed to revise the Montreux Convention" (Ahmad, 2004: 22). This was an early sign of the Soviet demands on Turkey that come at the end of WW II, and it prepared Turkey for a new orientation in its foreign policy.

By 1941, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was broken and Stalin allied the Soviet Union with Britain and France, with whom Turkey was also allied. Even though Turkey was formally on the side of the Allied Powers of Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States, it tried to stay neutral during WWII, and declared war on Germany in 1945 when the war was about to end. In 1942, almost all of Europe was under German control and the Soviet Union was occupied up to the Urals. Germany's ally Japan also had big advances in Asia. Under these conditions, the Nazi victory was a possibility and therefore, "Turkey's neutrality tended to favor Berlin" (Jung, 2003: 12). This has changed after Germany's surrender in Stalingrad in February 1943. British Prime Minister Churchill tried to bring Turkey into war "with the aim of entering the Balkans behind Ankara, before Stalin was able to do so" (Ahmad, 2004: 22). But then Turkish President İsmet İnönü was too cautious and preferred to remain neutral. Starting from 1944, Stalin brought up the question of the Turkish straits again when he met Churchill in Moscow in order to discuss post-war Europe and divide it into spheres of influence (Ahmad, 2004: 22-23). Turkey avoided the destruction of the war, but did not get the full benefits of being an ally of the victorious states.

Cold War Years

At the end of WWII, Turkey faced a Soviet threat. In 1945, Stalin abrogated the Turkish-Soviet friendship pact, and wanted to revise Turkey's Eastern borders as well as to establish Soviet military bases along the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. In the context of the rising Cold War, Turkey's security and territorial integrity was at danger, and neutrality was no longer a feasible option for Turkey (Turan, 201: 1; Gözen, 1995: 74; Jung, 2003: 4). Therefore, Turkey sought U.S. support, since Britain and France were too weak against the rising Soviet threat. U.S. support came with the announcement of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, and Turkey and U.S. relations grew closer. Turkey also wanted to be part of NATO, after its establishment in 1949. However, it was not admitted until February 1952, until after its participation in the Korean War which started in 1950 (See Ahmad, 2004: 26-32 and Hale 2002 for historical details of Turkey's changing foreign policy during this period).

At the start of the Cold War, Turkey, in many cases as a founding member, participated in all newly formed Western international organizations; among them were the United Nations since 1945, the Organization of European Economic Cooperation since 1948, and the Council of Europe since 1949, along with NATO since 1952. In 1963, Turkey concluded an association agreement with the European Community, which was named the Ankara Agreement. However, Turkey still could not become a full member of the EU, which will be discussed later. The Cold War facilitated Turkey's economic and political integration into Western institutions. Turkey also became an important part of the U.S. containment policy against Soviet expansionism. Thus, Turkey's foreign policy was fully anchored to a close alliance with the U.S. and the Western bloc as a whole (see Jung, 2003: 4 and Bagci, 2009: 5). In exchange, Turkey received a guarantee of protection from the Soviet threat under the NATO umbrella and a significant amount of military and economic aid in order to strengthen its defense (Bagci, 2009: 5).

Until the late 1960s, Turkey followed the US's lead and did not have an autonomous foreign policy. However, Ankara's confidence in its alliance with the U.S. was shaken in the 1960s due to developments related to Cyprus and the Cuban missile crisis. Turkey, along with Britain and Greece, was one of the guarantors of the 1960 Cyprus constitution, which protected rights of the Turkish minority on the island. Conflicts between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots escalated in the early 1960s and in November 1963 the proposal of the President of Cyprus (Makarios) to amend the 1960 Cypriot constitution led to the threat of Turkish military intervention and the beginning of a crisis between Turkey and Greece" (Ahmad, 2004: 32). Ankara was disappointed with Washington's failed support of Turkey's position on this issue in 1963 and was traumatized when then Prime Minister İnönü received a letter from U.S. President Johnson stating that if Turkey's actions invite a Soviet attack, the U.S. and NATO were not obliged to defend Turkey. In addition, President Johnson warned Turkey that it could not use U.S. made weapons in the Cyprus conflict. The U.S. arms embargo that came after Turkey's intervention in the Cyprus conflict in 1974 perpetuated this traumatized relationship in the 1970s as well. In addition, following the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the U.S.'s willingness to withdraw Jupiter missiles from Turkey further shook Turkey's trust in the U.S. for its security (see Ahmad, 2004: 32-33; Jung, 2003: 4). "The deep-rooted suspicions against the West never disappeared and were strongly reconfirmed by political events during the 1960s and 1970s....The Sèvres Syndrome with its conspiracy theories re-emerged" (Jung, 2003: 4).

Consequently, Turkey started to normalize its relationship with the Soviet Union. After Stalin's death, Khrushchev expressed regret for the Soviet claims on Turkey at the beginning of the Cold War, and the Soviet Union sought improved relations with Turkey during these decades. Nevertheless, Turkish-Soviet relations were limited and constrained by the nature of bipolarity and the Cold War between the two camps. "Turkey's security and, to some extent, economic dependence on the United States ensured that its attachment to NATO remained strong even despite complications like the status of Cyprus" (Turan, 2011: 1). Also, starting from the 1960s, Turkey's relations with the Arab world started to become normalized, and Ankara recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Partly as a response to the above mentioned disappointments with western policies, Turkey did not allow "the United States to use its military base in Incirlik during the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973.... While rooted in political problems, Turkey's rapprochement with its Middle Eastern neighbors was also due to economic problems and to the rising Islamic sentiments among its populace. In economic terms, the 1973 oil crisis, Turkish supplies of labor and manpower to Arab states, and the search for new markets in the Middle East accompanied Turkey's shift in foreign policy" (Jung, 2003: 4).

Post-Cold War Transformation

The end of the Cold War changed Turkey's geopolitical environment tremendously. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the immediate threat to Turkey's security ended, and multiple new states emerged in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Black Sea region and the Balkans. This change around Turkey vastly expanded its foreign policy area, and thus created new possibilities. Turkey as a middle power gained a greater degree of latitude in its foreign policymaking. Transition of Turkish foreign policy to the post-Cold War era was steered by a former World Bank economist, Turgut Özal, first as a prime minister from 1983 through 1989 and then as president from 1989 until his death in 1993 (See Murinson, 2006: 946; Turan, 2011: 1; Hale, 2002: 6; Alessandri, 2010: 4). Özal also was the starter of neo-liberal economic reforms in January 1980, then as a Minister responsible for the economy, and continued with those reforms during his tenure as a prime minister. By the 1990s, these reforms shifted the Turkish economy from being a semi-closed economy, which was dominated by policies of import substitution industrialization, to an export-oriented and neoliberal open economy. As a result, the end of the Cold War also coincided with Turkey's need for new markets for its exports and for investment opportunities for the new Turkish entrepreneur class of the 1990s.

During Özal's period, under a new geopolitical setting and economic needs, Turkish foreign policy, which was heavily influenced by Kemalism for 70 years, underwent a transformation for pragmatic reasons. Turkey experienced robust economic reforms domestically and increased activism in foreign policy. "Özal is accredited domestically with smoothing out the military's disengagement from politics after the 1980 coup" (Alessandri, 2010: 4). However, the military's influence was still strong, and seeing itself as the protector of Kemalism, it constrained Özal's domestic reform agenda and his foreign policy activism. Özal's foreign policy activism in the vast area that partly coincided with former Ottoman territories was labeled as neo-Ottomanism, which was coined by leading Turkish columnist and academic Cengiz Candar (Murinson, 2006: 945-946). "Ottomanism was a nineteenth-century liberal political movement aiming at the formation of a civic Ottoman national identity overarching ethnic, linguistic and religious identities" (Grigoriadis, 2010: 4). Supporters of Özal's liberal domestic reform and

foreign policy were also known as the Second Republicans. Özal's reforms also aimed at responding to "the domestic challenge of ethno-national conflict with the Kurdish separatists led by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party – Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan)" (Murinson, 2006: 945). Transformations of domestic policy and foreign policy mutually affected one another.

Historically, Turkey saw itself "as isolated in its region, surrounded by troubles in the Middle East, Balkans, and Caucasus and by hostile neighbors in Syria, Iraq, Iran, the former Soviet Union, Greece, and Cyprus [Greek]" (Migdalovitz, 2010: 3). New conflicts surfaced with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity, such as the Bosnian War, the Macedonian conflict, the Kosovo War, and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. As these conflicts stirred historical and cultural connections between Turkey and the Muslim populations of these regions, Turkey became part of these conflicts in parallel to "neo-Ottoman" foreign activism (Hale, 2002, p. 6; Murinson, 2006: 946). Turkey's new foreign policy orientation towards the newly emerged states was not only due to "idealist" cultural and historical links, but also was due to economic interests. At the end of the cold war, Armenian efforts to get international acknowledgment of the alleged genocide of its people during WW I, which Turkey refused, increased during this period. This dispute had also been partly frozen during the Cold War (Alessandri, 2010: 5).

Turkey's strong ties with the West were consistent with Atatürk's "modernization through Westernization." At the end of the Cold War, Turkey could not limit itself to the self-imposed Western bloc and to its role in NATO as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism. Turkey rediscovered its identity as a Muslim country, and re-appreciated its historical past and cultural and religious ties, which had been suppressed under staunch secularism since 1924. However, the multiplication and expansion of Turkey's relations did not aim at changing Turkey's Western orientation. "On the contrary, the recognition of all pieces of Turkish history and all faces of Turkey's identity was seen as allowing a reaffirmation of Turkey's choice for the West on a more solid and honest basis. Özal revived Turkey's interest in European integration, as this was seen as critical for its further development as an economy and as a democracy" (Alessandri, 2010: 4). Turkey, without drifting from its Western orientation, sought new roles in the Islamic world and in Central Asia as an inspiring country.

After the death of Özal in 1993, Turkey was ruled by weaker coalition governments and the military exerted stronger influence in its foreign policy until 2002. Turkey's relations with the Middle East were limited to improving economic relations, and avoided involvement in the Middle Eastern conflicts and politics as compared to Turkish foreign policy after 2002. Also, Turkish foreign policy was affected by the U.S. policies toward the region. The First Gulf War of 1980-1988 between Iran and Iraq, the subsequent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, which triggered the U.S.-led Second Gulf War of 1991, and the following UN sanctions interrupted Turkey's economic boom with its neighbors. Özal was eager to play a major role in the U.S. led coalition against Iraq, as he saw opportunities for Turkey's active role in the region; but he was constrained by the military. Nonetheless, the Turkish military and parts of the Kemalist bureaucracy were also infected by a new era of activism. Turkey-Israeli relations, during the second half of the 1990s, under the military's influence and with U.S. pressure, advanced in terms of military cooperation. The military was for cross-border operations in Iraq and played an active role in strongly pressuring Syria to stop its support of the PKK in 1998. Until then, Turkish Syrian relations were tense (Jung, 2003: 5; Alessandri, 2010: 5). As Turkey's

foreign policy in the 1990s became diverse and multifaceted, Turkey needed and, in some cases, was forced to deal with its neighbors. Turkey had to confront its problems with Greece as well in the 1990s, even though the relations did not improve until the end of the 1990s (Alessandri, 2010: 5). Turkey-Iranian relations continued with a degree of economic cooperation in the 1990s. Mutual economic interests also caused relations between Russia and Turkey to grow quickly.

Foreign Policy Approach of the Governing Party

Since 2002, under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP- Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), Turkey's foreign policy gradually became more active and geographically more widespread. As a continuation of Özal's activism, Turkish foreign policy evolved from a security-focused policy of the Cold War years to a proactive multidimensional approach. A larger concept of security with its economic, political, and security dimensions was adopted (Öztürk, 2009: 30).

During the AKP's rule, Turkey continued to seek EU membership along with becoming a significant NATO member. However, the foreign policy makers increasingly emphasized Turkey's geopolitical position as being located amid the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East regions and as a transit hub for a critical energy transfer from Central Asia/the Caucasus/ the Middle East and Europe and started to project Turkey "as a major regional power with ambitions to be a global actor and power" (Migdalovitz, 2010: 3). They often, with a moralistic tone, argued that Turkey's foreign policy was principled, humanitarian and sought to promote peace and stability in the neighborhood.

As a result of increasing foreign policy activism in a vast area, Turkey "has assumed the post of secretary-general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), taken observer status at the Arab League, joined the G-20 group of the largest world economies, held a nonpermanent seat on the U.N. Security Council, appointed an Assistant Secretary-General of NATO, and a Secretary-General of the Organization for Security Cooperation and Development (OECD), and sought seats on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank executive boards" (Migdalovitz, 2010: 3). Again, during this period, Turkey has succeeded in reducing tensions with its neighbors through pragmatic political and economic rapprochement with Syria, Iran, and Russia, and by avoiding geopolitical rivalry. The policy makers adopted a more pragmatic approach for solving the conflict in Cyprus, having improved relations with Greece, and dealing with the Armenian issue (Öztürk, 2009: 3). Moreover, Turkey initiated new diplomatic efforts and offered mediation for solving the Syrian-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts until 2009, after which Turkish-Israeli relations deteriorated.

All of these changes in Turkey's foreign policy came about with the rise of the AKP after Turkey's 2001 financial crisis. The newly founded AKP under the leadership of a former mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, won the November 2002 Parliamentary elections. It was mainly supported by liberal and conservative groups as an alternative to the Republican's People Party (CHP), which is supported by Kemalist, secular, and statist groups (Alessandri, 2010: 6). The Military and the Kemalist bureaucracy tried to prevent Erdoğan's rise to power, sometimes with behind-the-scene efforts and sometimes openly. However, alternative parties lost their

public support due to unsuccessful coalition governments in the late 1990s and the 2001 financial crisis, and the AKP capitalized on its increasing public support for its new and ambitious domestic and foreign policies. Until some legal obstacles were cleared for Erdoğan's premiership, Abdullah Gül served as the Prime Minister for a year. Since then, AKP has been reelected, with increased public support, in 2007 and 2011, and Erdoğan has been the Prime Minister. Abdullah Gül has been the President of Turkey since 2007.

Turkey's current foreign minister, Ahmed Davutoğlu, who is a former academic and first served as the Prime Minister's chief foreign policy advisor, has been the intellectual architect of Turkey's new foreign policy orientation. Before he became the foreign minister in 2009, he frequently traveled with Prime Minister Erdoğan, President Gül, and his predecessor Ali Babacan, who is currently the minister responsible for the coordination of economic policies. During his academic tenure, he articulated his foreign policy vision in a book called *Strategic Depth, Turkey's International Position*, published in 2001. It is "a treatise calling for a new Turkish foreign policy strategy based on a "multidirectional strategic vision" (Migdalovitz, 2010: 3). During its first term from 2002-2007, the AKP government has gradually adopted this vision, and starting from 2007 Davutoğlu's vision became Turkey's main foreign policy guide.

Murinson (2006: 953) finds the AKP's new dynamism as persuasion and realization of the neo-Ottoman doctrine of Özal. Also, Özal saw Turkey's Muslim identity along with its national identity, its Islamic culture, and historical legacy of the Ottoman past as sources of Turkey's "soft power" (Murinson, 2006: 950; Grigoriadis, 2010: p.4). However, Davutoğlu's doctrine is different from neo-Ottomanism in a several ways. Davutoğlu thinks, from a pragmatic perspective, that Turkey lost a lot of opportunities due to the Kemalists' ideological fixation on Europe and disengagement from the Islamic world and the Ottoman past. "More than Özal ever did, Davutoğlu focused on the strategic importance of the Muslim world and the need for Turkey to re-engage on this particular front. That said, he also stressed the importance of Turkey's geographic and historical ties with Christian neighbors like Greece and Bulgaria" (Danforth, 2009: 91).

Moreover, Özal often used his activist regional policy to enhance ties with the U.S., but the AKP's regional activism was sometimes not in congruence with U.S. policies. For example, Turkey's deteriorated relations with Israel contradict with U.S. Israeli policy and Turkey does not fully support the EU's and the U.S.'s policies toward Iran. Even though Turkey's regional policy is more autonomous, the U.S. and Turkey also have common goals in the regions, as will be discussed later.

Domestic Sources of Turkey's New Orientation

Turkey's authoritarian state structure has been eroding as social, economic, and political structures have been transforming from state control toward pluralism since Özal's liberal economic and political reforms. A number of new civil society actors entered into the political system and ongoing debates on Turkey's foreign and security policies have been diversified (Kadioğlu et al., 2010: 7; Öztürk, 2009: 30). Over time, democratic pluralism at home was linked to regional cooperative engagement abroad.

After Özal's death these reforms were slowed down, and there have been efforts to re-establish the "Kemalist system" in the late 1990s, but they only lasted until the election of the AKP. During the ruling of the AKP, democratic norms and structures increasingly internalized. In parallel, "Turkey's orientation gradually shifted from confrontation to engagement – a change that was made possible by the declining influence of the Turkish military on the formulation of foreign and security policy and which was greatly favored by the developing relationship with the EU" (Alessandri, 2010: 6). More democratic Turkey became more accepted, influential, and attractive in its neighborhood as well.

Moreover, as the Turkish economy grew and became more open, a plethora of new economic stakeholders (Anatolian elites) with expanding trade and business interests outside Turkey's borders emerged and favored Turkey's multiregional active foreign policy that protects their interests. They liked Turkey's image as a 'promoter of regional stability.' These traders and entrepreneurs saw "Turkey's vicinity as a vast and under-exploited market in which to make profits as opposed to a chessboard for the game of power politics" (Alessandri, 2010: 6). Economic factors also made Turkish foreign policy more pragmatic and less ideological, as compared to AKP's Islamist predecessor the Refah (Welfare) Party (Murinson, 2006: 947), from which many founders of the AKP came from. Thus, Turkey's engagements in all surrounding regions became more predictable.

As an outcome of globalization, the distinction between foreign policy and domestic politics is increasingly blurred. Foreign policy became a heavily contested issue in Turkey's domestic politics during the recent decades, and enabled the AKP to use foreign policy as a tool for defeating its rivals. AKP's proactive foreign policy and its underlying conservative Islamic identity as reflected in its foreign policy contributed to its subsequent electoral successes in 2002, 2007, and 2011 (Öniş, 2010: 19-20).

According to Davutoğlu:

Turkey's unique demographic realities also affect its foreign-policy vision. There are more Bosnians in Turkey than in Bosnia-Herzegovina, more Albanians than in Kosovo, more Chechens than in Chechnya, more Abkhazians than in the Abkhaz region in Georgia, and a significant number of Azeris and Georgians, in addition to considerable other ethnicities from neighboring regions. Thus, these conflicts and the effect they have on their populations have a direct impact on domestic politics in Turkey....Turkey experiences regional tensions at home and faces public demands to pursue an active foreign-policy to secure the peace and security of those communities (Davutoğlu, 2010a: 2).

External Sources of Turkey's New Orientation

Turkey, because of its geopolitical position, with territories both in Europe and Asia, surrounded by regions that are subject to great power rivalry, "cannot adopt a passive policy of opting out of international politics" according to Hale (2002: 8), and can actually benefit from its position. Turkey as a mid-level power, using its historical and cultural links as well as its geo-strategic location, can play an important role in international politics through an active foreign policy. As discussed in the next section, Davutoğlu's "strategic depth" vision points to this.

Turkey's "wing country" position in NATO's strategic concept also changed as NATO's mission and area of activity expanded up to Afghanistan. Turkey is no longer a wing country and cannot be a peripheral, sideline country of the EU, NATO or Asia. Because of its geopolitical position and the "strategic depth", Turkey faces pressure to assume important roles in regional crises of the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East. It is juggling the establishment of harmony between its strategic alliances and its neighbors and neighboring regions (Davutoğlu, 2010a:2-3). In addition, according to Öniş, (2010), "recent Turkish foreign policy highlights ... the changing nature of globalization in the direction of a multi-centric, more pluralistic global order—a pattern that was accelerated by the global financial crisis which represented a clear challenge to American or Western hegemony—has paved the way for BRICs or the near BRICs like Turkey to play a more active role in regional and international affairs" (pp. 19-20).

Turkey EU candidacy status also contributed to its foreign policy orientation as a "moderating and disciplining factor. Turkish elites realized that chances for a breakthrough would remain nil until relations with neighbors were normalized and disputes were set on a path of resolution. But the 'EU anchor' worked also at a deeper level as reforms undertaken to meet EU standards fostered democratization and liberalization while favoring a 'de-securitization' of issues which had plagued Turkey's relations with its neighbors in the past"(Alessandri, 2010: 6). Moreover, in the post-September 11 context, Turkey has been seen, by the West, as a "role model" for Middle Eastern countries as it is a democratic and Muslim country with harmonious relations with the West. Thus, Turkey received implicit support for its active foreign policy in the Islamic world.

The "Strategic Depth" Doctrine and Operating Principles

The "strategic depth" doctrine of Davutoğlu emphasizes Turkey's geo-strategic location, its economic and human resources, and its cultural links fostered by shared history with the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Turkey needs to rediscover its historic and geographic identity and reassess its position in the regional and global settings. Turkey, with its location at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa, or in the middle of "the Rimland belt" that goes from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, has a very strategic location. Its maritime basin consists of the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and extends to the Caspian Seas and the Persian Gulf. Turkey, as seen during the Cold War years, cannot be portrayed as a periphery country of Europe and NATO, and bases its foreign policy on this perception. Turkey is a centrally positioned international player. Davutoğlu does not see Turkey's geopolitical location as only useful for determining a strategy for defending borders and the status quo. For him, Turkey, with its optimal geopolitical location, cannot define itself in a defensive manner. From his perspective, after the Cold War, Turkey is capable of conducting active foreign policy in several regions simultaneously, while exerting and maintaining influence in its immediate neighborhood (See Bağcı, 2009: 5; Murinson, 2006: 952-953).

Although Davutoğlu's strategic thinking revolves around the geopolitical location of Turkey, "it is supplemented by liberal elements, such as soft power, conflict resolution and promotion of "win-win" solutions" (Grigoriadis, 2010: 4). Turkey could, with its cultural and historical ties with the surrounding regions, especially in the Ottoman geopolitical space, and

with its “soft power” potential such as its democratic institutions and growing market economy, follow an active foreign policy to promote peace and stability. Therefore, “Turkey needs to put aside the militaristic image promote conflict resolution, regional economic cooperation which would obviate the need for regional intervention of great powers” (Grigoriadis, 2010: 4-5).

In sum, from Davutoğlu’s perspective, Turkey has “strategic depth” and “soft power” stemming from its geopolitical location, its cultural and historical ties, its economic potentials and democratic institutions. With its Muslim identity, Turkey also has a potential role in the Islamic World beyond the former Ottoman territories, reaching out to Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Therefore, Turkey can play a proactive role with a visionary, comprehensive but harmonious foreign policy approach in a vast geographic area, in multiple regions, and claim a central role in world politics. Turkey, instead of being dependent only on the Western alliance, should act as an autonomous actor, and should strengthen its relationships with other powers, such as Russia, China, and India, without giving up its Western ties (for more details see Davutoğlu, 2009: 6-12; Davutoğlu, 2010: 3-4; Aktaş, 2010: 4; Turan, 2011: 3-4). In other words, Turkey as a central player should not be content with a regional role, but should play a leading role in several regions, and realize its global strategic significance.

According to Davutoğlu three methodological and five operational principles drive Turkey’s foreign policy. Among the methodological principles are: (1) a comprehensive and “visionary” approach to issues instead of the “crisis oriented” attitude of the Cold War years; (2) basing Turkey’s foreign policy on a “consistent and systematic” framework around the world; and (3) new discourse and diplomatic style in the spread of Turkey’s “soft power” in the region. The operational principles include balance between security and democracy, “zero problem with neighbors,” preemptive peace diplomacy, adherence to multi-dimensional foreign policy, and compatible global relations with active involvement in global issues in all international organizations (Davutoğlu, 2010: 3-4; Bağcı, 2009: 5). Among these, “zero-problem with neighbors” has been a popular slogan of Turkey’s foreign policy during the AKP’s rule, comparable with Atatürk’s “peace at home, peace in the world.” In contrast to the Atatürk era’s foreign policy of low international involvement, AKP seeks active foreign policy to establish order in the region as a major regional broker.

Foreign Policy in Practice

As discussed before, Turkey has been following a multi-dimensional and proactive foreign policy, unprecedented in Turkey’s history. It re-engaged with the Middle East region, in particular, Iran, Syria, and the Gulf States; developed good relations in the Balkans with a special emphasis on Greece and Bulgaria, established close relations with Georgia in the Caucasus and deepened relations with Central Asia that started during Özal’s tenure. Turkish foreign policy aimed at developing strong economic linkages and a balanced approach toward all regional and global actors (Murinson, 2006: 953). In parallel to the activism in foreign policy, Turkey’s commercial relations have expanded globally, Turkish schools have become widespread around the world and Turkish serials and movies have become popular, spreading contemporary Turkish culture that was recreated since the establishment of the republic through adoption and mixing of Western practices. “The country is now seeking to establish itself as a partner in business, a

center of cultural attraction and as a hub for political mediation, aspiring to win the hearts and minds of its neighbors” (Kadioğlu et al., 2010: 7).

Even though the AKP’s autonomous and geographically expanded foreign policy started in 2002, it gradually evolved into an even more active and independent foreign policy after the second election victory of the AKP in 2007 and especially after Davutoğlu’s appointment as minister of foreign affairs in 2009 (Turan, 2011: 2). When the AKP came to power in 2002, it faced three major international problems that occupied Turkish foreign policy the most during the first years of the government. They were the U.S.’s involvement in and later occupation of Iraq, Turkey’s membership in the EU, and the renewed effort by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to solve the Cyprus problem (Aydin, 2010: 7).

The U.S. welcomed the AKP’s coming to power and active foreign policy. Taşpınar (2010) argues that “following 9/11, Washington placed Turkey high on its agenda as part of the neo-conservative project to prove Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ wrong. At the time, the Bush administration had romanticized Turkey as ‘a model for the Muslim world, a model for the future.’ This US vision corresponded with Davutoğlu’s and his party’s vision for Turkey” (p.13). Yet, the relationship between the two countries cooled when the Turkish parliament with AKP majority members turned down the U.S.’s request to open another front from the Turkish territory to stage its Iraqi invasion in 2003.

The Turkish parliament’s decision was criticized by the opposition and the U.S. But, it demonstrated to neighbors and the world that Turkey could and would act independently. This was not a turn away from the U.S. or the West. Turkey allowed the Incirlik Air Base to be used by American combat aircrafts during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and still values its NATO ties to the extent of allowing radar stations to be deployed on its territory (Falk, 2012: 1-2). The Incirlik Air Base is one of the symbols of Turkey’s geostrategic importance to the U.S. Since the 1970s, all Turkish governments have allowed the U.S. use of the base under a bilateral defense cooperation agreement, and the U.S. provides some foreign aid in exchange. After 2003, however, U.S. foreign aid decreased, and trade relations between the two countries did not advance during the Bush administration. Moreover, the AKP’s engagement with Hamas, Iran, and Sudan seemed to be contradicting U.S. policies, and Turkey’s deteriorated relations with Israel have been of concern to the U.S. administration and to some members of Congress (Migdalovitz, 2010: 3). Davutoğlu, however, argued that Turkey’s Middle East policy was perfectly in line with Western goals (N.A., 2010: 1). Turkish American relations improved after Obama’s election as President in 2009.

In 1999, Turkey was granted EU candidate status with the Helsinki Summit. The AKP “displayed from the start the firmest and most explicit pro-EU orientation of all parties. Once in government, it lived up to most expectations concerning relations with the EU” (Alessandri, 2010: 7). The government resumed an unprecedented process of internal reforms and persuaded the EU on opening negotiations for accession talks in 2005.

The AKP government during its second term after the 2007 elections also continued with reforms to bring Turkey closer to the EU *acquis*, but at a relatively slower phase. There were several reasons for this. According to Alessandri (2010), “campaigns such as the government of

France's, which have gone so far as to question Turkey's 'belonging' to Europe, have undercut the efforts made by reformers in Turkey— within and without the AKP – while making European public opinion more doubtful and apprehensive” (p. 7). While French President Nicolas Sarkozy rejected Turkey's membership, German Chancellor Angela Merkel seemed to be in favor of a Turkish “special relationship” rather than full membership. In addition, the EU's admittance of the Republic of Cyprus as a full member a few weeks after Greek Cypriots' rejection of the Annan Plan in 2004 also created ambivalence with regard to moving the process forward on Turkey. The AKP supported the Annan Plan despite Turkish nationalist groups and the military's opposition, and the majority of Turkish Cypriots approved the plan in the 2004 referendum, while Greek Cypriots rejected it. The EU disregarded Turkey's position and admitted the Republic of Cyprus. Thus, the EU removed possible motivations of the Greek Cypriot government to make concessions toward a resolution. Later, Cyprus started to stand in the way of opening several chapters in the accession talks. Moreover, AKP supporters lost their EU enthusiasm further due to Sarkozy's government's attempt to make denial of Armenian genocide a crime, and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)'s failure to support the freedom of women to wear headscarves on Turkey's university campuses (Kadıoğlu et al., 2010: 18; Turan, 2011: 2-3).

Despite some European leaders' rejection of Turkey as European, and the exclusion of Turkey from the ESDP project, Turkey is still important for the EU for its potential to be an energy-transit country to provide greater energy security (Bagci, 2009: 6). And according to Davutoğlu, “membership in the EU is Turkey's strategic choice and this objective is one of the most important projects of the Republican era” (2010b: 11). Therefore, the Turkish government remains committed to EU membership and appointed Egemen Bağış as full-fledged chief negotiator and Minister of EU affairs. The government also made significant progress in areas critical to the EU, such as the respect of minorities, a comprehensive democratic opening process towards the Kurds, and the attempt to normalize relations with Armenia through signing two protocols on October 10, 2009, which neither side has ratified yet (Grigoriadis, 2010: 7). Before the AKP's coming to power, its predecessors had never established diplomatic relations with Yerevan, because of its efforts for international recognition of genocide claims and “its occupation of a sixth of Turkic Azerbaijan's territory, including the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh” (Cornell, 2012: 14). Azerbaijan strongly objected to any improvement of relations between Yerevan and Ankara before Armenia's withdrawal from the occupied Azeri territories (Turan, 2011: 3).

Historically, Turkey and Russia have been rivals and were in different blocs during the Cold War years. There are still some controversies between the two countries, “stemming from their geopolitical locations” (Bagci, 2009: 7). However, despite some problems, Turkey is important for Russia in terms of its control over the Straits, its geopolitical position in the Middle East and its potential for being a large market for Russia. Russia is important for Turkey, because of its military power with large arsenals of weapons, including the nuclear ones, its natural resources, and its advanced technology in some areas. Turkey's renewed efforts to normalize relations with its neighbors had further enhanced Turkey-Russia relations, which have grown since the end of the Cold War (Bagci, 2009: 7). As relations improved, Russia became Turkey's second largest trading partner, the main natural gas and significant oil supplier. Recently,

Turkey and Russia have signed an agreement to build Turkey's first nuclear power plant (Turan, 2011: 3).

Turkey has increased its diplomatic presence and relations with African and Latin American countries as well. Africa's significance in Turkey's foreign trade has been increasing fast. As Latin America's influence, especially that of Brazil's in global politics and economics grew, Turkey sought Brazil's support in its mediation between Iran and the Western powers. Turkey also sought new economic opportunities in South and East Asia, in particular with China, Japan, and South Korea (Turan, 2011: 3).

It is obvious that "zero problems with neighbors" did not solve all of Turkey's problems with its neighbors. But, according to Davutoğlu, it signaled Turkey's intentions and approach to its neighbors as broadly understood that Turkey will not be a problem-making country, but a problem-solving country (Altayli, 2012).

Foreign Policy Change toward the Middle East

Until the end of the Cold War, Turkey was aloof from the Middle East and did not have autonomous relations with the region. In the 1990s, Turkey's economic relations developed selectively with a few neighboring countries. Only during the last decades, especially during the AKP's second term, Turkey with a new foreign policy vision extended its relations to the whole Middle East and North Africa (MENA). "Davutoğlu was eager not only to banish lingering bad memories associated with centuries of Ottoman rule over much of the Arab world, but also to renew connections with countries that shared Turkic and Muslim identities" (Falk, 2012: 1-2). He portrayed Turkey as a stabilizing force and an honest broker in the region.

Turkey's regional activism included efforts for mediation between the Western alliance and Iran on the Iranian nuclear enrichment program. Turkey also sought closer economic relations with Iran, which is one of the large energy providers to Turkey, along with Russia. It also mediated peace negotiations between Israel and Syria successfully, until Israel's Gaza offensive, which destroyed the peace process and started to deteriorate Israel's relations with Turkey. The Turkish government also offered its "good offices" in conflicts between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and between the rival Palestinian factions of Fatah and Hamas. Turkey's relations with Iraq and Syria were improved to a level where not only strategic partnership agreements were signed but also joint cabinet meetings were held. Turkey also reached out to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, with which the relations were often upset due to the PKK's presence. With Syria, a joint military exercise was conducted. Before the arrival of the Arab Spring, Turkey already had a free trade zone with Syria and was establishing one with Lebanon and Jordan (Bilgin, 2011: 3; Cornell, 2012: 14).

Along with improved political relations, Turkey's economic and business relations boomed with the region. Turkey's moves in the regions were mostly welcomed in the West as well, even though Ankara-Tehran and Ankara-Damascus relations were criticized. "The AKP argued that it could function as an interlocutor with these regimes on Turkey's border with which Brussels and Washington had only limited ties and that a more active Turkey would also benefit

the West.... Western leaders generally gave the AKP the benefit of the doubt as it assured them that its outreach could help moderate rogues and bring them within the international system” (Cornell, 2012: 14). Thus, Turkey aimed at finding solutions to regional problems through reduction of tensions and mediation, and through building stronger relations with its immediate neighbors (Perthes, 2010: 2-3). Turkey pursues a policy based on the status-quo and territorial integrity in the region. It also aims at a balanced approach among all parties involved (Bagci, 2009: 9).

Turkish-Israeli relations grew stronger in the 1990s, especially in the area of military cooperation, followed by economic cooperation. These relations helped Turkey to pressure Syria to stop its support of the PKK, and Syria had to extradite PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1998. The AKP government also had good relations with Israel and, as mentioned before, mediated between Syria and Israel. A day before Israel’s Gaza war of 2008, Turkish mediators felt that they were on the verge of securing a peace deal between Israel and Syria (N.A., 2010: 1). The Gaza War proved to be a turning point in Turkey’s relations with Israel.

In January 2009, Erdoğan became very vocal in criticizing Israel’s actions in the war and stormed out of the meeting at the World Economic Forum in Davos. After Davos, Turkish government officials continued to criticize Israel more. It was a strong sign of a shift in Turkey’s foreign policy in favor of the Palestinian cause at the expense of the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations. Turkish-Israeli relations worsened with the well-known “Mavi Marmara (or Flotilla) crisis” occurring on May 31, 2010. Fully equipped Israeli soldiers stormed on the Mavi Marmara, a passenger ship and the biggest one of a flotilla of six ships carrying tons of humanitarian aid to besieged Gaza. They killed 9 activists, 8 of whom were Turkish, and wounded 30 activists. Of course, Turkish officials condemned Israel for carrying out “state terrorism” and Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations were reduced to the lowest point in history (Öniş, 2010: 5, 6). Israel claimed that it acted in self-defense and criticized the organizer of the flotilla, a Turkish charity group known as IHH, as being a front for global jihadists (Turkey’s, 2010: 1-2). Turkey denied the accusation and called for a public apology from Israel. The UN-sponsored Palmer Report on the issue also angered Turkish officials, not necessarily for its legal reasoning but for its “justification for and intentions of the IHH and other actors attempting to break Israel’s blockade” (Cebeci et al., 2011: 4). Moreover, the Eastern Mediterranean has been increasingly subject to regional competition among Turkey, Cyprus, and Israel which could escalate to power politics in regional relations. The dispute over drilling rights off Cyprus coasts is straining Turkish- Greek Cypriot relations further.

There are other reasons for the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations. The strategic relations between Israel and Turkey were only supported by a very small segment of the population. The opposition to Israel has increased Erdoğan’s domestic support and Turkey’s popularity in the Arab World and further contributed to improved relations with the MENA region. Israel, however, has recently apologized to Turkey, accepting to compensate the flotilla victims’ families and ease the embargo that it imposed on Gaza. Thus, even though Israel accepted the conditions of the Turkish government for good relations, the relations have yet to improve.

Turkey's relations with Iran and Syria grew stronger in parallel to Turkey's cooled relations with Israel before the Arab Spring. After the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003, Turkey, Iran, and Syria shared new security perceptions and overlapping interests, as all three were interested in a stable and a territorially unified Iraq and they rejected the formation of an independent Kurdish state (See Öztürk, 2009: 22-23). In addition, in the post- Cold War era, Iran's importance as an energy supplier of Turkey has increased. Turkey heavily depends on Iranian gas along with Russian gas, and Iran is a market for many Turkish products. Moreover, some Turkish companies are engaged in the development of Iranian hydrocarbon fields, and the Turkish government desires to transit Iranian gas to the West through Turkey (Grigoriadis, 2010: 7; NA, 2010: 1), if Iran-Western relations get on a stable and peaceful track. Therefore, Turkey fears that any conflict involving Iran could ripple widely and affect Turkey's regional interests. Therefore, it is important for Turkey that the dispute between Iran and the Western alliance over the Iranian nuclear program is solved peacefully.

Turkey assumed a key mediating role and distanced itself from the U.S. and the EU stance. Erdoğan often criticized the Western double standard regarding nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, pointing to the fact that Israel has not been pressured by the West for owning nuclear weapons. In 2010, Turkey along with Brazil tried hard to broker a deal on the issue of Iranian uranium enrichment, so that the UN Security Council would not impose additional sanctions on Iran. In May 2010, Turkey and Brazil were able to convince Iran on the low-enrichment nuclear fuel swap and three foreign ministers signed an agreement in Tehran. Despite the Tehran agreement the Security Council approved the fourth sanctions package to Iran, to which Turkey objected in the Security Council and voted against the sanctions (Grigoriadis, 2010: 7; Öniş, 2010: 5-7). Turkey could not succeed in a compromise solution between Iran and the Western alliance, but its policy on this matter demonstrated another example of autonomous foreign policy actions, and attracted criticism from U.S. and EU officials (Öniş, 2010: 7).

As the U.S. prepared to leave Iraq, Turkey attempted to develop good relations with both the Baghdad federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Therefore, Turkey changed its policy toward the KRG in Northern Iraq from containment to engagement, and recognized the legitimacy of the KRG as a federal entity within Iraq. This was a radical departure in Turkish foreign policy toward the region (Grigoriadis, 2010: 7). In fact, Davutoğlu visited Erbil in October 2009, followed by Erdoğan's visit in 2010. The KRG President Massoud Barzani and its Prime Ministers also visited Turkey multiple times. Davutoğlu argued that Turkey was a gate of Iraq to the EU and the KRG was a gate of Turkey to Basra. (Grigoriadis, 2010: 7). Even though this relationship seemed to be fragile, it benefited both parties. Over 700 hundred Turkish companies with over 10,000 workers are located in KRG (Bilgin, 2011: 3). Turkey and the KRG agreed in principle to build pipelines that allow the KRG to export oil and gas via Turkey. Thus, the KRG will no longer be dependent on pipelines controlled by Baghdad. This agreement, however, angered the Baghdad government, which tries to have more control "over exploration and development contracts that the Kurds are negotiating with international oil companies" (Hannah, 2012). Turkey's relations with Baghdad deteriorated as relations with the KRG improved.

Since the early 1990s, Turkey has been suggested as a "model" for democratization and economic development in the US and elsewhere from time to time. As discussed previously,

after September 11, this was more vocalized. However, it was not too clear what the Turkish model entailed. Was it a top-down Kemalist modernization, which marginalized the role of Islam and tradition, or was it rather a later era democratization experience, which has incorporated Islamic and conservative values since the 1990s? Until the establishment and election of the AKP, there was no successful example that showed the compatibility of democracy and Islam. The AKP was able to engage with secular and Western values while keeping conservative Islamic values. It thus proved that an Islamic-conservative worldview and democratic values could be compatible. This experience was especially valuable in the post-September 11 era and was appreciated more as the party pushed for democratization reforms in the process of EU accession (Afacan, 2012:2; Öztürk, 2009: 23). Even though Turkey was not emulated as a model, the AKP model inspired many in the Middle East. Turkey's rejection of the U.S. request in 2003 and the government's criticism of Israel's unilateral Palestine policy along with Turkey's economic and diplomatic successes have earned it growing respect in the Arab world. Moreover, Turkey and Spain, at the Prime Minister level, engaged in a dialogue between the "West" and the "Islamic world" under the aegis of the UN initiative called the "Alliance of Civilizations" (Öztürk, 2009: 24-25).

A Multi-Directional Foreign Policy Not "Adrift"

Some argued that Turkey, under the AKP rule, was drifting away from the predominantly Western orientation toward a more "eastern-oriented" pattern of foreign policy behavior. However, Turkey did not only improve relations with the Middle East. In fact, as we have seen, Turkey followed a multidirectional foreign policy, proactive on multiple fronts. Turkey is equally concerned with the Balkans, Greece and Europe as it is with the Middle East. Turkey had a strong impetus to develop relations with Russia and the Caucasus as much as it did to seek improved relations with the Middle East. Turkey offered to mediate between Russia and Georgia after the war in August 2008 and took steps toward solving frozen conflicts in the Caucasus region (See Öniş, 2010: 3 for similar arguments).

During the second phase of the AKP government, Turkey's commitment to the EU seemed to be weakened, as we discussed earlier. Turkey's increased relations with MENA coincide with slowed relations with the EU. Also during the second period, the AKP followed increasingly more independent and assertive foreign policy (Öztürk, 2009: 22; Alessandri, 2010: 9; Oran, 2010: 11). However, Turkey's foreign policy has been implemented in a spirit of multilateralism and it did not drift from the EU, NATO and other Western orientations. In addition there is competition in the Middle East for regional influence among Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Davutoğlu often denied rupture claims in the foreign policy. Davutoğlu (2010a) asserts that "the European Union and NATO are the main fixtures and the main elements of continuity in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has achieved more within these alliances during the past seven years under the AKP government than it did in the previous 40 years. Turkey's involvement in NATO has increased during this time.... Turkey also has advanced considerably in the European integration process compared with the previous decade, when it was not even clear whether the EU was seriously considering Turkey's candidacy.... Turkey has been able to formulate a

foreign-policy vision based on a better understanding of the realities of the new century, even as it acts in accordance with its historical role and geographical position. In this sense, Turkey's orientation and strategic alliance with the West remains perfectly compatible with Turkey's involvement in, among others, Iraq, Iran, the Caucasus, the Middle East peace process, and Afghanistan” (pp. 2-3).

The Arab Spring and Turkey

Turkey's Response to the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring started in Tunisia, where a Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in December 2010, and ignited massive protests and uprisings against the authoritarian regimes, not only in Tunisia, but in multiple countries across the MENA region. These developments not only shocked the authoritarian regimes of the region, but also surprised the Western World as well as Turkey. The widespread uprisings turned into one of the most important transformational forces in the Arab World. Other regions, from southern and eastern Europe to Latin America, and from East Asia to Africa, had their waves of democratization a few decades ago. Until the arrival of the Arab Spring, the liberty that is enjoyed in many parts of the world seemed to have bypassed the Arabs (Ajami, 2012a: 1; Afacan, 2012: 1). Even though the demands and processes in the Arab Spring countries have been the same, every country is unique in itself, since political and economic conditions as well as population and military structures are different. This transition to democracy so far has bypassed Arab monarchies in the Gulf, Morocco, Jordan, and Oman. The calls in these countries have mostly been for constitutional limits to royal rule rather than for their overthrow (N.A., 2011).

Did Turkey inspire the Arab Spring? No, but as we discussed earlier, the AKP government showed that you can be Muslim, secular and democratic. In addition, Turkey's successful free-market economy along with its democracy set an example. Therefore, some political Islamist movements emulated the AKP in the region and many Arabs have looked to Turkey for inspiration. They saw Turkey's accomplishments as replicable (Cornell, 2012: 22; Kucukcan et al., 2011: 1). Of course, one size does not fit all. Each Arab country that experienced the Arab Spring has distinctive historical, socio-cultural, and political conditions. “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” (Afacan, 2012: 2).

How did Turkey perceive the Arab Spring? The Arab Spring caught nations by surprise, and Turkey was also not prepared for it. Before the start of the Arab Spring, Turkey was getting along with the authoritarian regimes of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria. It brought new opportunities and new challenges for Turkey. When the protests started in Tunisia, the Turkish government had a special Cabinet meeting, according to Davutoğlu (2012), and they made a strategic decision. They assessed 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” (p.8). In that meeting, they decided to support the Arab people. It was their right to demand and this was the flow of history (Davutoğlu, 2012: 8).

From Davutoğlu's perspective, the Middle East is just being normalized through adjusting to the Post-Cold War environment. The impact of the Cold War in the region created abnormalities, countries were divided, and the Soviet type of governance ruled the region. "Throughout the Cold War, because of the Israeli-Arab war, of course, and because of the Soviet type of governance, there was an absence of...the legitimacy link between the leaders and the people" (Davutoğlu, 2012: 7). Davutoğlu argues that countries need to have the right balance between freedom and security. Sacrificing security in favor of freedom will lead to chaos, and sacrificing freedom in favor of security will lead to dictatorship. "For many decades, Arab societies were told that they need to sacrifice from their freedom because there is the security threat of Israel or because of security threats for others" (Davutoğlu, 2012: 5).

Thus, the Turkish government found the uprisings justified and in the right direction as well as irreversible. Therefore, Turkey, like many other countries, took the side of the streets against the authoritarian regimes from the beginning. Prime Minister Erdoğan, ahead of the other world leaders and with his popularity on the Arab streets, called Egypt's Hosni Mubarak to resign in concurrence with his people's desires. The Obama administration was far more cautious than the Turkish government (Cook, 2011: 1; Cornell, 2012: 21). According to Cook (2011), "there was a regional rivalry at play here, too: Ankara sensed that Cairo's influence was waning and wanted to fashion itself as a new Middle East powerbroker" (p.1). According to Aybet (2012), Erdoğan's move came after tacit agreement with his Western counterparts.

As the government took the side of the street, its "zero problems with neighbors" policy came to a temporary halt until the regime's change. This position was in agreement with the Turkish foreign policy view of promoting democratic change at home and abroad, coupled with spreading "soft power" across the region. The Arab Spring gave a unique opportunity to Turkey in promoting democratic regimes and stability (Paul and Seyrek, 2011: 1). Even though Turkey suffered considerable economic losses due to the sudden change and instability brought by the Arab Spring, it was seen as a long overdue correction in the region. Turkey aimed at continuing good economic and political relations with the new governments in these countries.

It was relatively less costly for Turkey to support oppositions in Tunisia, Egypt, or Yemen. But when the Arab revolutions spread to Libya and Syria, Turkey was cautious, due to economic links with Libya, and improved relations with Syria. Turkish businesses (mostly construction) had over \$10 billion USD worth in contracts, and a \$25 billion worth construction machine park in Libya. Moreover, over 25,000 Turkish citizens were working in the country. Economic imperatives to keep good relations were clear, and therefore, Erdoğan found it difficult to cut ties with Muammar al-Qaddafi abruptly (Cornell, 2012: 21). Turkey first encouraged Qaddafi to take steps toward reforms, and opposed international intervention. It objected to the prospect of a no-fly zone, which was discussed by NATO members in February 2011. In the meantime the Interim Libyan National Council was begging for international support. Erdoğan, Gül, and Davutoğlu cast doubts on Western motives, referring to the rich oil resources of Libya (Cornell, 2012: 21). Turkey's position looked strange when the Arab League approved a no-fly zone to prevent Qaddafi's use of airpower. Ankara ultimately changed its position in May 2011, and agreed to support NATO's intervention in Libya, after the evacuation of Turkish citizens from Libya. On May 3, Erdoğan declared to a gathering of journalists in Istanbul that Turkey "wishes to see Libya's leader step down immediately and leave Libya

immediately for his own sake and for the sake of his country's future" (Cook, 2011: 2). When an uprising began in February 2011 in Bahrain, Turkey was again cautious supporting the opposition given its important economic interests with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Turkey and the Syrian Crisis

As mentioned earlier, Turkey also developed a close relationship with Syria, which lasted until the Arab Spring uprisings reached Syria. Turkey-Syrian relations changed from being at the brink of war in 1998 to positive in 2005, and visa requirements for tourists were mutually lifted in 2009. As economic and political ties grew, Turkey also mediated between Israel and Syria for the return of the Golan Heights to Syria. At various levels governmental official visits increased. Bashar Assad visited Ankara, marking the first visit in 57 years to Turkey by a Syrian head of state. Turkey's relations with Syria also developed despite US opposition and criticism (See Grigoriadis, 2010: 6; Murinson, 2006: 955-956 for details). Thus, Turkey-Syrian relations grew on all fronts during the AKP period and Turkey became Syria's largest trading partner.

Before the start of the Arab Spring, Syria was a model success story for the AKP's foreign policy doctrine and practice. Turkey-Syrian relations seemed to be solid. When the Arab Spring began, Turkey strongly desired a peaceful change in Syria without upsetting its improved relations. Therefore, the Turkish government first pressured Assad to initiate comprehensive political reforms and accommodate the demands of the opposition. As expressed by the Turkish President and Prime Minister, in the beginning they trusted that Assad would follow the path of reform (Cebeci et al., 2011: 14; Paul and Seyrek, 2011: 2). As Assad deployed troops and tanks against peaceful protestors, the Turkish government continued to pressure Assad to implement [reforms] without further delay (Gül, 2012:1; Cook, 2011: 2). Assad, however, ignored repeated warnings from the Turkish government, and continued to use violence against civilian protestors instead of following the path of reform and change. In the spring and summer of 2011 violence escalated, and by June, Erdoğan declared that Turkey cannot continue to support Syria under these conditions. (Cornell, 2012: 22).

Turkey also tried to negotiate compromise between Assad and the opposition. As compromise failed, Turkey increasingly shifted its support to the opposition. By August 2011, Turkey took the side of the opposition. Thus, Turkey's Syrian policy evolved from sole pressure on Assad for political reforms to efforts for unifying opposition groups, such as Syria's Friends meetings in Istanbul, to negotiating compromise between Assad and the opposition to actively supporting dissident groups and promoting international sanctions against the Syrian regime. As a result, relations deteriorated with the Assad government quickly.

Syria's shooting down of Turkey's military plane, and cross-border cannon shots from Syria as Syrian forces and Free Syrian Army fighters clashed, have increased tensions between the Assad government and Turkey. Turkey was no longer able to "extract itself from the ongoing turmoil" (Tol, 2012: 2). Since then, Syria has occupied a central place in Turkey's domestic and regional calculations.

As the Syrian internal war continued, refugees poured into neighboring countries, including Turkey, and hundreds of civilians have died daily. Moreover, Syria became an area of

geopolitical rivalry. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan have worked for regime change and supported the opposition; whereas Iran, Russia, Iraq and Lebanon supported Assad. With international support along with considerable domestic support, Assad has been able to hang on, perpetuating the crisis.

Iran, which has four decades of strategic partnership with Syria and its client Hezbollah in Lebanon, has continued to back the Assad regime. The Iranian and Syrian governments have shared anti-Western and anti-Israeli positions, and both have been under international sanctions. Iran has been worried about the possibility of the establishment of a pro-American, pro-Saudi regime in Syria and that its links to Hezbollah in Lebanon would be severed after the fall of Assad. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan, which are Sunni and pro-Western, have supported the opposition and do not want Assad to stay in power. They see themselves as balancing the rise of Iranian and other Shia influences in the region. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries see Iraq as lost to Iran and the Shia camp. Therefore, the Gulf countries would gain an important advantage in the regional Shia-Sunni balance by turning Syria's Shia-affiliated Alawi regime into a Sunni one (Pack and Creveld, 2012; Miller, 2012: 5; Paul, 2012).

Russia has also been an important supporter of Assad, and China went along with Russia on this matter. Vladimir Putin has been opposing any possibility of using force to topple the Syrian regime. On the Libyan case, "Moscow is convinced that it was tricked into supporting a resolution to protect civilians, only to see it used as a cover for air strikes to get rid of Col. Muammar Gaddafi" (Paul, 2012). Therefore, Russia vetoed the UN Security Council resolutions that implied intervention in Syria. According to Paul (2012), Russia also has considerable interest in Syria, including a military base, and economic and military relations with regime. It lost most of its allies in the region and does not want to lose Syria. In addition, Putin has feared that if a pro-Saudi regime replaced the Assad regime, Saudi influence would further spread and reach Muslims in the North Caucasus, as it happened in Chechnya (Miller, 2012: 3).

The crisis disturbed Turkey's relations with Iran and Russia. However, as discussed earlier, Turkish-Russian relations, with over 30 billion dollars in trade, have improved greatly since the end of the Cold War. Similarly, Turkey's economic relations with Iran have also grown. Russia and Iran have been Turkey's largest suppliers of oil and natural gas. Even though oil and gas have been the leading components in Turkey's economic relations with these countries, construction, tourism, and transportation have also been important sectors. As a result, strong economic ties have constrained these countries from deteriorating the improved relations due to the Syrian crisis. President Putin's visit to Turkey on December 3, 2012 showed that Russia valued its economic ties with Turkey more than its ties with the Assad regime.

Even though Turkey wanted this crisis to be resolved as soon as possible, an immediate solution to the crisis has not been possible without international cooperation and a compromise solution acceptable to all involved parties. Washington wanted to exclude Iran in seeking a solution to the Syrian crisis, but it has been hard to solve the crisis without including all key players that have influence in Syria. After Assad's fall, Iran could become more aggressive in its nuclear program in order to make up for the lost leverage. Any international solution would also require Russia's cooperation. However, it has been hard to persuade both Iran and Russia for a solution acceptable to all sides.

As the international community could not agree on a solution for the crisis, it has created a bigger challenge to Turkey's foreign policy approach in the region and became a test for Davutoğlu's doctrine. Inside Turkey, the main opposition party, Peoples Republic Party (CHP-Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) of Turkey became very critical of Turkey's involvement in the Syrian crisis. Considering the possible outcomes of the Syrian crisis and the associated geopolitical rivalry, both positive and negative stakes have been high for Turkey.

Conclusions

The Arab Spring did not change the AKP's multi-directional and active foreign policy based on the strategic depth doctrine and usage of Turkey's soft powers stemming from its geopolitical location, its cultural and historical ties, its economic potentials and democratic institutions. However, how this policy is implemented in the MENA region has changed. Before the start of the Arab Spring, "zero problems with neighbors" was a priority for Turkey's Middle East policy, and therefore Turkey refrained from pushing hard on democracy and human rights. Turkey was able to get along well with Assad, Qaddafi, and Mubarak. However, after the government made its choice on the side of legitimate demands of the Arab Spring uprisings, Turkey has become more overt in criticizing the oppressive regimes and promoting democratic change in the region (Yilmaz and Kanat, 2011: 1, 2).

Turkey judged that the change brought by the Arab Spring was inevitable, and gave support to those demanding democratization despite short-run economic costs. Turkey wanted to speed up the transformation of the region with a vision that it would expand its role as an economic and political actor in the emerging new Middle East. Excluding the Syrian case, Turkey's relations with the countries affected by the Arab Spring have, in fact, increased significantly. Turkey continues to deepen its ties with the region's newly elected leaders as well as the different political actors and the people. Not only government to government relations but also civil society relations between Turkey and the region have been growing. During the AKP period, Arab countries' shares in Turkey's exports increased significantly. Even though the AKP's policies toward the region are not ideological but rather based on Turkey's mutual interests with regional countries, the common cultural and historic ties as well as Islamic values create an affinity between Turkey and the region.

AKP's success in Turkey continues to inspire the people and new governments of the region. Turkey, as a middle level power, with its largest and fastest-growing economy, will continue to play a significant role in dealing with regional issues and developments. The Syrian case, however, has proved to be the most difficult issue for Turkey to handle. First the Libyan crisis and then the Syrian crisis showed the limits of Ankara's autonomous foreign policy and its "soft power" approach toward the region. These crises showed Turkey that it cannot solve them alone with autonomous policies, without the support of the U.S. and the NATO.

Deepening relations with the Middle East, however, will not change Turkey's ties with the West. Turkey will continue to be anchored to the West and will continue to seek strong relations with the U.S. and the EU as well as hold on to the rope of NATO in the foreseeable future. As Davutoğlu argues, NATO remains Turkey's anchor and the EU remains its "strategic, historical choice" (Migdalovitz, 2010:4).

About the Author:

Fahrettin Sümer, Ph.D. is a faculty member at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), having earned his M.A. in political science from Rutgers University and his Ph.D. in international studies from the University of South Carolina. During his doctoral training in the Department of Government and International Studies (currently the Department of Political Science), he earned a second M.A. degree in economics from the Moore School of Business at the same university. Since completion of his Ph.D. in 2003, he has published several articles and a book entitled *The Neglected Impact of Non-Economic Factors on the Development of Financial Crises and Governmental Responses: The Mexican and Malaysian Cases of the 1990s* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America). He taught multiple international relations, comparative politics, and economics courses in South Carolina and Virginia before joining AUIS in 2012. His research interests include the causes and implications of globalization, financial crises and governmental responses, international political economy, international conflict, international integration, and Turkey's relations with its neighbors, including the European Union. He can be contacted at: Fahrettin.sumer@auis.edu.iq

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