

---

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

---

THE ELLIOTT SCHOOL  
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

---

THE INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

IMES CAPSTONE PAPER SERIES

STRATEGIC DEPTH OR STRATEGIC DRIFT?: CONTENDING WITH  
TURKEY'S RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SYRIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

JORDAN STECKLER  
DARRIN ALTMAN

MAY 2011

THE INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

THE ELLIOTT SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

COPYRIGHT OF THE AUTHORS, 2011

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Much of the literature and debate surrounding the evolving contours of the conduct of Turkish foreign policy, both inside and outside Turkey, center on the normative question of whether Turkey's strategic alignment is undergoing a fundamental shift away from the West. Such a reading of events is colored by factors that include the Justice and Development Party's (AKP's) roots in political Islam; its recent gains against Turkey's traditional Kemalist military and bureaucratic elites; Turkey's attempts to carve out a more proactive role for itself in Middle Eastern affairs; its seemingly newfound willingness to follow a policy line that differs from the U.S. approach to regional affairs; and the emergence of populist, anti-Western sentiment in foreign policy rhetoric and conduct.<sup>1</sup> While Turkey's stance toward the Middle East has indeed undergone a "methodological and qualitative" change, its chief foreign policy executive, Foreign Minister (FM) Ahmet Davutoğlu has emphasized that "the axis of our foreign policy is toward NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], the EU [European Union], and the transatlantic process."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while the era of Turkey as a pliant U.S. and NATO-backed "regional gendarme"<sup>3</sup> has effectively ended, we argue against the notion that Turkey's strategic alignment is undergoing a radical transformation. This assertion is not meant to belittle the substantive changes that are taking place in Turkey's global and regional strategies;

---

<sup>1</sup> Kramer, Heinz. "AKP's 'New' Foreign Policy between Vision and Pragmatism." German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Working Paper (June 2010): 1-41. P. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Özcan, Mesut, and Ali Resul Usul. "Understanding the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Changes within Continuity Is Turkey Departing from the West?" Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politiki 6.21 (2010): 109-133. P. 111.

<sup>3</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints." International Crisis Group, Europe Report 203 (April 7, 2010). P. 1.

changes that reflect Turkey's evolving self-perception in terms of geography, history, culture, geopolitics, religion, and identity.<sup>4</sup> With regard to each of the aforementioned variables, there are underlying tensions at play: East vs. West, the Middle East vs. Europe, and religiosity vs. secularism. Historically, Turkey's Kemalist elites sought to construct a Turkish identity characterized by Westward orientation, modernism, and secularism. Turkey's foreign policy was driven by these elites, and thus reflected their exclusive Westward orientation.

Since the 2002 accession of the AKP, these ideational questions of East vs. West have returned to the fore. Rather than viewing concepts such as the West, Europe, secularism, and modernity as being mutually exclusive from concepts like the East, the Middle East, and Islam, the AKP has sought to utilize Turkey's unique position at the center of these divides in historical, cultural, and geostrategic terms to bridge them. In foreign policy terms, the AKP has thus pursued a more independent and multi-dimensional foreign policy predicated upon Davutoğlu's doctrine of "strategic depth." The notion of "strategic depth" is rooted in Davutoğlu's cultural-historical analysis of Turkey's position in international politics, with particular emphasis on Turkey's soft power potential in the modern nation-states which comprise the former Ottoman Empire. Although a seemingly academic concept by nature, "strategic depth" has proven to be a "rather prescriptive and policy-oriented concept" that has served "as a justification of a more diversified and more active Turkish foreign policy by opening the conceptual horizon to the full realm of modern Turkey's Ottoman past."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Fuller, Graham. The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008. P. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Kramer. "AKP's New Foreign Policy." P. 4.

In practical terms, implementation of a foreign policy based on “strategic depth” has led Ankara to adopt policy initiatives at odds with the wishes of U.S. lawmakers. Turkey has cultivated warmer ties and/or strategic partnerships with a range of U.S. competitors and adversaries including Russia, Syria, Iran, and Hamas; has frustrated U.S.-led efforts to economically and diplomatically isolate Iran; and it has imposed hurdles to NATO’s planned missile defense shield in Europe on the grounds that it unfairly singles out Russia, Syria, and Iran as threats.<sup>6</sup> By pursuing such policies and sharp rhetoric, Turkey has demonstrated willingness to alienate its traditional Western allies, yet it has simultaneously sought to maintain its strategic partnerships with the U.S., Israel and NATO as pillars of its foreign policy, as well as the EU accession process.

Turkey’s regional pro-activism and engagement with a host of actors, many of whom have widely divergent or outright conflicting interests with its traditional allies has created confusion over the future path of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey’s newfound desire for foreign policy independence—and particularly its willingness to integrate into the Middle East—poses a host of challenges to Washington, but also opportunities. Our capstone first will be an exploration of the driving forces behind Turkey’s new foreign policy assertiveness. We will examine the interplay between economical, energy-related, ideological, domestic political, and external factors in the formulation of Turkey’s evolving foreign policy. Having accomplished this task, we next will undertake a case-study of one particularly dynamic component of Turkish foreign policy which is rich in challenges and opportunities—its bilateral relations with Syria.

---

<sup>6</sup> McElroy, Damien. “Turkey Objects to NATO Missile Shield Targeting Iran.” [Telegraph](#) October 18, 2010.

In spite of the short-term turbulence in U.S.-Turkish relations, ultimately, with proper diplomatic and managerial acumen on both sides, this critical partnership can continue to flourish. The areas where our interests converge outweigh those where there are substantive differences. With the correct strategy on the table, Turkey's closer relations with Syria and the broader Middle East can actually redound to our benefit and increase Turkey's strategic value to the US.

## **2. TRANSFORMATION OF THE DOMESTIC SCENE: FROM KEMALISTS TO THE AKP**

The discourse over Turkey's evolving foreign policy is directly intertwined with the changes undergone on the domestic political scene since the 2002 accession of the AKP. Turkey's changing foreign policy is in large part a reflection of internal processes of contestation taking place within Turkey on issues which cut to the core of its identity; issues such as nationalism, the divide between Islam and secularism, civil-military relations, democratization, and the rule of law. Traditionally, Turkish foreign policy has been the realm of Kemalist military elites, who perceived themselves as the guarantors of Turkish secularism and the "protector of American interests in Turkey."<sup>7</sup> The political success of the AKP, spurred on by significant gains in the 2007 Parliamentary election, has led to a reconfiguration of behind the scenes power in the formulation of Turkish foreign policy.

### **2.1 The Kemalist Legacy in Turkish Foreign Policy Formulation**

Turkey's Kemalist elites shaped the modern Turkish Republic, founded in 1923, according to a vision which emphasized escaping from the "backward and repressive"

---

<sup>7</sup> Walker, Joshua W. "The United States and Turkey: Can They Agree to Disagree?" Brandeis University Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Middle East Brief 46 (November 2010): 1-7. P. 3.

legacy of Ottoman Islamic rule in favor of a “westernized, homogenous, ethnically-based nation-state.”<sup>8</sup> The elites, who comprised the ranks of the state bureaucracy and military, imposed their program of political, economic, and social modernization from above with scant regard for or connection to the Turkish populace which, contrary to the wishes of the Kemalists, could not be considered “homogenous in cultural [ethnic and religious], political, economic, and social terms.”<sup>9</sup> The Turkish Republic’s political trajectory was thus characterized by a center-periphery disconnect which was reinforced by the authoritarian tendencies of the former, particularly the tendency toward military intervention against political elements which attempted to contest core Kemalist secular values. Representative democracy was thus never permitted to fully take root in Turkey, as “the development of a genuine political elite based on party politics and electoral competition”<sup>10</sup> would challenge the sacrosanct interpretation of Kemalist principles of secularism, nationalism, and republicanism.

With foreign policy decision-making vested among the Kemalist military and bureaucratic elites, Turkey’s foreign policy came to represent an extension of the identity that the Kemalists had constructed, in that its westward orientation mimicked the ongoing domestic processes of westernization.<sup>11</sup> Turkey’s decisiveness in joining NATO in 1952 can be understood in this context. Beside the threat posed to Turkey by the Soviet Union, “NATO membership solidified Ankara’s Western orientation by establishing a long-

---

<sup>8</sup> Fuller. P. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Kramer, Heinz. A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000. P. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. P. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Özer, Dinçer. “Syria and Turkey Relations: The Changing Face of Turkish Foreign Policy.” Fatih University, Civilacademy Journal of Social Sciences 5.3 (2007): 15-30. P. 17.

lasting institutional and functional link with the West.”<sup>12</sup> Because they sought a radical break with Turkey’s Ottoman past, Kemalist reforms—such as banishing Islam from the public sphere, replacing Arabic script with the Latin alphabet, and abolishing the caliphate—were designed to unravel Turkey’s ties to its Islamic past and to the broader Muslim world.<sup>13</sup> The Kemalists embraced an interpretation of history whereby “Islamic culture was seen as the source of Turkish backwardness and weakness; the ‘other’ out of which an enlightened new Turkey would arise.”<sup>14</sup> The Kemalists’ derogatory views of the Muslim world developed into a paranoia which they exploited “both to preserve Turkey’s domestic power and to justify an authoritarian approach to guarding the nation against external threats.”<sup>15</sup>

This authoritarian approach enabled the Kemalist elites to dominate Turkey’s foreign and domestic politics even though their disconnect with the broader populace hindered their modernization programs from fully taking root. According to Soner Cagaptay, although the Kemalists “emphasized the unifying power of Turkish nationalism over religious identity, Turkishness never replaced Islam; rather, both identities overlapped. Atatürk managed to overlay the country’s deep Muslim identity with secular nationalism, but Turkey retained its Muslim core.”<sup>16</sup> In spite of the overriding authoritarian tendencies of the Kemalists, democratic undercurrents persisted

---

<sup>12</sup> Karaosmanoğlu, Ali L. “The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey.” *Journal of International Affairs* 54.1 (Fall 2000): 199-216. P. 209.

<sup>13</sup> Rabasa, Angel, and F. Stephen Larrabee. *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*. RAND Corporation National Defense Research Institute, 2008. P. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Fuller. P. 28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* P. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Cagaptay, Soner. “Why Turkey Will Emerge as the Leader of the Muslim World.” *Hurriyet Daily News* November 21, 2010.

in Turkish society for several decades, as “the marginalized periphery (attempted) to find its political voice and representation” largely through political Islam.<sup>17</sup>

The Kemalists did permit limited democratic openings, however, as they perceived democratization to be part and parcel of the process of westernization.<sup>18</sup> Turkey’s democratic trajectory from the 1950s through 1980s came to be characterized by give-and-take. According to Yavuz, the basis for Turkish politics is a power struggle borne of cultural cleavages “between Turkey’s Muslim masses and its pseudo-westernized elite.”<sup>19</sup> The marginalization of the periphery gave rise to an Islamic “counterculture,” spread by informal religious networks and educational systems which fostered a popular Islamic identity that was effectively “the hidden identity of the Kemalist state.”<sup>20</sup> Naturally, the Kemalists feared the proliferation of autonomous networks opposed to their secular-nationalist program and attempted to suppress the burgeoning civil society. The advent of multiparty democracy in 1946 increased the political space afforded to those marginalized by the secularism of the Kemalists, however, whenever it appeared that political Islam was creeping into the discourse, the military would stage a coup to restore the nation on the Kemalist track; a situation likened to “democracy on training wheels.”<sup>21</sup>

Yavuz emphasizes three aspects of Kemalist ideology which historically have caused “the pendulum of Turkish politics [to] swing back and forth between democratization and military intervention”:

---

<sup>17</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Karaosmanoğlu. P. 209.

<sup>19</sup> Yavuz, M. Hakan. “Cleansing Islam From the Public Sphere.” *Journal of International Affairs* 54.1 (Fall 2000): 21-42. P. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Fuller. P. 14.

1) Its uncritical modernization ideology prevents open discussion that would lead to a new and inclusive social contract that recognizes the cultural diversity of Turkey; 2) it does not tolerate the articulation of different identities and lifestyles in the public sphere since they undermine the Kemalist vision of an ideal society; and, 3) it treats politics as a process of guiding political development and engineering a new society. Thus Kemalism does not see social, cultural, and political differences as integral to democracy, but rather treats such differences as sources of instability and threats to the national unity.<sup>22</sup>

## **2.2 The Özal Era and the Rise of a New Elite**

Our Capstone is concerned with the current era in Turkish politics, which is remarkable in that the pendulum appears to have swung irrevocably to the side of democratization. How were the traditionally marginalized elements of Turkish society able to wrest political and foreign policy power away from the Kemalist elite? Paradoxically, the 1980 military coup and subsequent three years of military rule marked the first stages of the transition. The three-year military rule ravaged Turkish society, as the generals in charge imposed martial law, suspended the constitution, disbanded labor unions and political parties, summarily arrested and convicted over 40,000 Turks in special security courts, and passed hundreds of laws curtailing public freedoms by decree.<sup>23</sup> The generals' extreme measures inadvertently provoked an intense reaction

---

<sup>22</sup> Yavuz. P. 22-23.

<sup>23</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future. New York: Times Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2010. P. 128.

from a Turkish society that was tired of witnessing its liberties trampled upon, ushering in a sweeping victory for reformist candidate Turgut Özal and his Motherland Party.<sup>24</sup>

Özal's most important reforms were undertaken in the economic sphere. Özal recognized the immense untapped entrepreneurial potential of the Turkish masses that was being stifled by Turkey's statist and isolationist outlook. During his 10 years in power, Özal implemented neoliberal reforms which rapidly transformed Turkey from a highly restricted and closed system into one where the private sector took on a far more vibrant and activist role.<sup>25</sup> By replacing import substitution policies with export-led growth, a new class of industrialists and businessmen arose outside the established urban industrial centers in the Anatolian hinterland—the Anatolian bourgeoisie or so-called “Anatolian tigers”—who sought access to neighboring markets traditionally closed off to Turkish industry.<sup>26</sup> The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union further broke down structural and ideational barriers to Turkey's diplomatic, energy, and foreign economic relations with the newly liberated republics and with Middle Eastern countries formerly aligned with the Soviet Union, although the military hindered meaningful transformation of Turkish foreign policy throughout the 1990s.

### **2.3 The 1990s: Reconsolidation of the Kemalists' Foreign Policy Power**

The rise of the “Anatolian tigers” is arguably the most important development which paved the way for the current era in Turkish politics, characterized by the decline of the military and the ascendance of civilian leadership in foreign affairs. However, this path was far from preordained, as the 1990s in fact witnessed the military further

---

<sup>24</sup> Özal would serve as Prime Minister from 1983-1989 and as President from 1989 until his death in 1993.

<sup>25</sup> Kasaba, Reşat, and Sibel Bazdoğan. “Turkey at a Crossroad.” *Journal of International Affairs* 54.1 (Fall 2000): 1-20. P. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Kramer. *A Changing Turkey*, P. 13.

consolidating its grip on foreign power supremacy. Despite the elimination of the overriding Soviet threat and desire of the new business class to cast aside Turkey's traditional conspiratorial outlook in favor of regional diplomatic and economic integration, Turkey's entrenched military elites "continued to view the international system through Cold War lenses well into the 90s."<sup>27</sup> Turkish civil-military relations during this decade were characterized by the military's mistrust of civilian leadership and ongoing self-perception as the guardians of Turkey's modernization project, causing it to securitize certain issues and frame them as existential threats in order to maintain their hold on behind-the-scenes power.<sup>28</sup> Three internal security developments during the 1990s enabled the Turkish military to capitalize on its enhanced domestic autonomy in order to commandeer foreign policy decision-making: the intensification of the Kurdish separatist/PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) terrorism problem, the ascendance of political Islam and 1996 rise to power of the Islamist Welfare Party, and instability due to the inability of the civilian leadership to contend with political and economic crises and corruption.<sup>29</sup>

The PKK insurgency, which became regional in scope following the establishment of Kurdish safe-havens on Iraq's border with Turkey,<sup>30</sup> was the dominant issue in the conduct of Turkish foreign policy throughout the 1990s. Turkey's military cooperated closely with the U.S.-led coalition's Operation Provide Comfort (OPC),

---

<sup>27</sup> Bacik, Gokhan. "The Rise of Identity Politics in Turkey." *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 23 (May 2010): 47-60. P. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Aras, Bulent, and Rabia Karakaya Polat. "From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran." *Security Dialogue* 39.5 (October 2008): 495-515. P. 498.

<sup>29</sup> Uzgel, İlhan. "Between Praetorianism and Democracy: The Role of the Military in Turkish Foreign Policy." *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 34 (2003): 177-211. P. 186, 184.

<sup>30</sup> Özcan, Gencer. "The Changing Role of Turkey's Military in Foreign Policy Making." *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 23 (May 2010): 23-46. P. 26.

which aimed to bring security to and pacify the Kurdish safe havens,<sup>31</sup> fulfilling the military's prerogative for close relations with the U.S. which were cast into doubt due to Turkey's unsure strategic position in the post-Cold War order. The military's dominance over the foreign policy process was symbolically sealed when the civilian echelon relinquished their authority to prolong OPC to the military-controlled National Security Council.<sup>32</sup> The predominance of the Kurdish issue, and the military's capitalization upon it, caused Turkey's relations with its Middle East neighbors "to revert to its former cautious and conservative nature" for the greater part of the 1990s, especially in light of the instrumental role Iran, Iraq, and Syria played in exacerbating the issue.<sup>33</sup> Further, it catalyzed a period of intense military cooperation between Turkey and Israel, which proved strategically valuable (although domestically unpopular in Turkey) in providing both sides leverage against their shared adversaries.<sup>34</sup> This development did not gain Turkey any accolades among Middle Eastern regimes or publics.

Political Islam was the next main threat to the secular, ethnically homogenous societal order that the Kemalist elite sought to preserve. As mentioned earlier, Turgut Özal's neoliberal reforms created a new class of business and industrial elites in the socially conservative and more religious Anatolian hinterland. Seeking domestic and foreign policies that were conducive to their business interests, the "Anatolian tigers" mobilized politically, forming the highly influential Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD) which was comprised of Islamic businesses.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. P. 27.

<sup>33</sup> Kirişçi, Kemal. "Turkey and the Muslim Middle East." In: Makovsky, Alan and Sabri Sayari, eds. Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy. Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000. P. 41.

<sup>34</sup> Fuller. P. 116-118.

<sup>35</sup> Kramer. A Changing Turkey, P. 67.

MÜSİAD's growing influence gave considerable clout to the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) which was borne out of the National Outlook Movement, the party of Turkey's marginalized "new Anatolian bourgeoisie, urban poor, and excluded Kurds" and the dominant representative of Turkey's complex and variegated political Islam.<sup>36</sup>

The RP emerged as the largest party in the 1995 election and by 1996 came to power in a coalition government, marking the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic that an Islamist leader, Necmettin Erbakan, was Prime Minister.<sup>37</sup> On the foreign policy front, Erbakan "tried to establish the first elements of what could be termed a more Islamic foreign policy" with steps such as overtures to Iran and Libya.<sup>38</sup> Yavuz writes of this trend:

A closer examination of the Welfare Party's identity indicates that it was based to a large extent on the binary opposition of West versus East. Its rejection of 'the west within,' namely the Kemalist modernization project to create a new Turk, manifested itself in the Welfare Party's foreign policy outlook as well. In short, the Welfare Party leadership was very much dependent on a perception of the West as colonial, unjust, oppressive and, ultimately, Christian. The Welfare Party's identification of the Muslim-Turkish self as Ottoman-Islamic was designed in direct opposition to the West within the country.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Yavuz. P. 33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Uzgel. P. 184.

<sup>38</sup> Kramer. A Changing Turkey. P. 71-72.

<sup>39</sup> Yavuz. P. 34-35.

In spite of these developments, Turkish foreign policy during this period remained heavily securitized, with the RP bowing to the military's demands regarding Western cooperation on the Kurdish issue and intensifying security ties with Israel.<sup>40</sup>

The creeping Islamization represented by the RP's accession catalyzed a return to Turkish politics based on a power struggle between Kemalist elites and Islamic counter-elites. Although the military maintained the upper hand in the foreign policy realm, the RP was fundamentally opposed to closer relations with the EU; advocated the formation of an Islamic NATO; and cultivated close ties with radical Islamic actors including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>41</sup> The RP leadership polarized Turkish society along religious-secular lines, leading the military to once again intervene in Turkish politics. Unlike previous coup instances, this time the military very openly voiced its discontent with Erbakan's perceived efforts to institute an Islamic regime, culminating in the February 28, 1997 National Security Council meeting where the generals introduced 18 measures to combat Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>42</sup> Rather than directly taking control, as was the established norm, the military mobilized a pressure campaign by the secular establishment, leading to Erbakan's resignation and subsequent banning of him and his party for five years in what has come to be known as the "silent" or "post-modern" coup.<sup>43</sup>

#### **2.4 The Islamists Adapt: Tactical Embrace of Democracy and the EU Process**

The "post-modern" coup had a transformative effect, at least at the tactical level, on Turkey's political Islam movement. Realizing that the established rules of the game

---

<sup>40</sup> Kramer. *A Changing Turkey*, P. 72.

<sup>41</sup> Kirişçi. P. 42.

<sup>42</sup> Uzgel. P. 185.

<sup>43</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 44.

would lead to their ouster if they attempted to contradict core Kemalist values of secularism and Westernism, Islamist politicians set about establishing a new party in 2001, the AKP, which reframed the Islamist movement as loyal “to the fundamental values and constitution of the Turkish Republic.”<sup>44</sup> As Daği explains, the marginalization and oppression the Islamists experienced as a result of the February 28 process led them to seek “protection within the language and institutions of modernity whereby they discovered the utility of human rights and democracy.”<sup>45</sup> Although the Kemalists had the power within the state apparatus, the Islamists had people-power on their side, and for the first time the new AKP leadership perceived democratic participation as a source of legitimacy and an essential component of their survival strategy.<sup>46</sup> This tactical embrace of democratic values—and especially their embrace of the EU accession process—ultimately paved the way for Turkey’s Islamists to gain the upper hand against the Kemalist elites.

The primary factor which must be explored in this ongoing process of Turkish democratization is the EU accession process, inaugurated at the 1999 Helsinki Summit. Ironically, this process, which could be viewed as the apex of the Kemalist elite’s desires, played perhaps the pivotal role in marginalizing the military’s foreign policy control and curtailing its predilection toward intervention against political Islam’s encroachment into Turkish politics. The EU demanded serious reform of Turkey, in particular calling for the reordering of state-society relations, which in turn created an ideal environment for democratically-supported Islamist actors to participate in politics without fear of reprisal

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. P. 46.

<sup>45</sup> Daği, İhsan. “The JDP: Identity, Politics, and Discourse.” In: Yavuz, M. Hakan, ed. The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and The AK Parti. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, Utah Series in Turkish and Islamic Studies, 2006. P. 95.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. P. 96.

from the Kemalist military and bureaucratic elites.<sup>47</sup> Turkey's Islamist groups thus supported full integration with the EU, first because the politically influential Anatolian bourgeoisie bloc within the Islamist movement sought enhanced access to European markets, and second, because they correctly perceived that their religious and political rights would be better protected under the EU than under the Turkish constitution.<sup>48</sup>

## **2.5 Desecuritization Further Marginalizes the Military**

The other key factor in the marginalization of the Kemalist elites was the desecuritization of the Kurdish issue, which the military had heretofore utilized to justify their authoritarian approach to controlling foreign policy. The regionalization of the PKK issue was manipulated to reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudices about the Middle East, which had the prescriptive effect of holding hostage Turkey's relations with its neighbors due to prevailing security concerns.<sup>49</sup> In particular, the Kurdish issue caused significant enmity with Syria, which utilized the PKK to leverage its relations with Turkey, providing training facilities in Lebanon's Biqa' Valley and refuge to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, Turkey was successful in quelling the PKK uprising, with the turning point coming after Ankara issued an ultimatum that led to Öcalan's expulsion from Damascus and subsequent capture in Kenya in 1999.

Until this point, the Kurdish issue was treated solely as a military affair. After 1999, it was possible to no longer view the issue exclusively through the lens of terrorism, but rather as a problem requiring political solutions and the redress of Kurdish

---

<sup>47</sup> Bacik. P. 50.

<sup>48</sup> Yavuz. P. 40.

<sup>49</sup> Aktay, Yasin. "Politics at Home, Politics in the World: The Return of the Political in Turkish Foreign Policy." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21.1 (Winter 2010): 61-75.P. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Fuller. P. 95.

social and economic grievances.<sup>51</sup> As mentioned earlier, political Islam and Kurdish separatism were the two main issues that the military securitized as representing the largest threats to the Kemalist vision for Turkish societal order. It is no coincidence that the process of desecuritizing both issues began in earnest in 1999, the year the EU accession process began. Bulent Aras writes of this phenomenon:

In Turkey's domestic politics, the main driving force [of desecuritization] has been the role of the EU membership process. The EU serves to desecuritize various issues as member-states focus on issues such as integration into the economic and political games of the West. The negotiation process triggers a change in identity and interests through which securitized issues such as minority rights start to be downplayed... The capture of the leader of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) in February 1999 and the so-called postmodern coup against the Welfare Party-led coalition government in 28 February 1997 have also contributed to a political climate that has not only triggered an economic and political reform process but also eased the transition to a reform-oriented mindset and a process of desecuritization.<sup>52</sup>

## **2.6 The Islamists Gain the Upper Hand**

The aforementioned process of desecuritization enabled the 2002 electoral victory of the AKP which effectively marked the end of the Kemalists' hegemonic control, which had been loosening for some time, over Turkey's domestic and foreign politics.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Fuller. P. 88.

<sup>52</sup> Aras and Polat. P. 499.

<sup>53</sup> Han, Ahmet K. "From 'Strategic Partnership' to 'Model Partnership': AKP, Turkish-US Relations, and the Prospects under Obama." *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 23 (May 2010): 77-112. P. 86.

Although the Kemalists have been highly mistrustful of the AKP and the injection of political Islam into the public sphere that their accession represents, the changed domestic landscape and the EU reform process have conspired to create a situation where military intervention is no longer feasible. The EU-induced political reforms Turkey underwent made the system more representative of Turkish society writ large, giving impetus to the articulation of the political demands of the AKP's previously marginalized domestic power base and permitting for the first time the flourishing of a civil society which could effectively advocate on behalf of various interest groups.<sup>54</sup>

The AKP and its base have been the primary beneficiaries of this newly vibrant civil society, utilizing the new political space to create institutionally protected formalized networks that have become increasingly prominent in foreign policy and security decision-making—a realm previously closed off to civilian influence.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the ongoing process of desecuritization has caused an inversion of Turkish politics, with civilians (the AKP and its civil society base) ascending to the status of elites and the Kemalists losing their exclusive grip over the security discourse. This sea change has ushered in a more open era of Turkish foreign policy decision making, with formerly marginalized actors now getting the upper hand in defining the national interest and crafting policy. These new elites have a vested interest in maintaining their hard-fought gains and institutional protections in place to preserve their status, effectively forestalling the possibility of a coup.

While a rosy picture thus emerges of Turkish society breaking free of the Kemalists' authoritarian impulses to gain control over their own destiny, some caveats

---

<sup>54</sup> Özcan, Gencer. P. 31-32.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. P. 32.

must be attached. As mayor of Istanbul, AKP leader and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan once infamously quipped “Democracy is like a streetcar. When you come to your stop, you get off.”<sup>56</sup> Against this backdrop, it is easy to read the AKP’s impetus for domestic reform not as geared toward facilitating EU accession, but rather as seeking to change the rules of the political game and enhance its maneuverability by sidelining powerful secular institutions like the military and courts.<sup>57</sup> And indeed, the AKP has changed the rules of the game drastically as it has consolidated power over the foreign-policy decision process. Aside from the military, the AKP has sought to curtail or co-opt the influence of other secular institutions such as the judiciary, media, and NGOs.<sup>58</sup> Many in Washington read events such as the 2007 Ergenekon Conspiracy, where 600 military and intellectual elites were summarily arrested by AKP police,<sup>59</sup> and the September 12, 2010 constitutional referendum, which codified greater AKP control over the high courts,<sup>60</sup> as “the final nail in the coffins of the military and secular elites that once protected U.S. interests.”<sup>61</sup>

### **3. KEY DRIVERS OF TURKEY’S NEW FOREIGN POLICY**

As the AKP has consolidated domestic power, Turkey’s foreign policy has increasingly come to represent the values and strategic objectives of its ruling party. The Kemalists pursued a foreign policy that was exclusively Western-oriented, reflecting the constructed identity they attempted to foist upon Turkey which was characterized by secularism, Westernism, and derogatory views of Ottoman and Islamic influences. By

---

<sup>56</sup> Rubin, Michael. “Turkey, From Ally to Enemy.” *Commentary* (July/August 2010): 81- 86. P. 86.

<sup>57</sup> Carpenter, J. Scott and Soner Cagaptay. “Regenerating the U.S.-Turkey Partnership.” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Notes 2* (November 2010): 1-14. P. 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* P. 4.

<sup>59</sup> McNamara, Sally, Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., and James Phillips. “Countering Turkey’s Strategic Drift.” *The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounders* 2442, (July 26, 2010): 1-18. P. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Carpenter and Cagaptay. P. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Walker, Joshua W. “Will Turkey Remain an American Ally?” *Providence Journal*, December 2, 2010.

contrast, Turkey's new foreign policy is a byproduct of the AKP gaining the upper hand in the ongoing internal processes of contestation over the trajectory of Turkey's identity. As Turkey's politics are now more representative of its society as a whole, so too is its foreign policy, abandoning the exclusive Westward orientation in favor of broadening the country's economic and political horizons in all directions, thereby reflecting Turkish society's heterogeneity.

Several negative external developments have placed the AKP's foreign policy objectives at loggerheads with Washington's desires. These include the failure of the EU to accept Turkish accession and the perception that the EU negotiates with Ankara in bad faith, and the Bush administration's diplomatic mishandling of the run-up to the Iraq war. The AKP has made significant inroads in the Arab and Muslim world, as well as within Turkey, by aligning its foreign policy with populist, anti-Western, and anti-imperialist Turkish and Arab sentiment. This is manifested in concrete policy terms in the 2003 decision to refuse U.S. troops permission to transit Turkish territory in support of the invasion of Iraq, escalating hostile rhetoric toward Israel, impeding U.S. efforts to isolate Iran through expansion of trade and energy ties, and voting against the latest round of UN sanctions targeting Iran.

Ankara's bid to enhance its stature in the Arab world has come at a price, however, namely a "reconfiguration of Turkish American relations marked by lasting political distance between Ankara and Washington plus a severe deterioration in relations with Israel."<sup>62</sup> Notably, the military was the primary driver of Turkey's close relations with Israel, as it fit into their overall strategy of strategic partnership with the West, and

---

<sup>62</sup> Kramer. "AKP's New Foreign Policy," P. 13.

provided a valuable source for advanced training and military hardware.<sup>63</sup> The accelerated deterioration in Turkish-Israeli ties, particularly since the Gaza Flotilla incident, reflects the eroded status of the military in foreign policy conduct, and indicates that the populism espoused by the AKP has become the dominant driver of Turkish foreign policy.

Turkey's foreign policy evolution would not have been possible without the changes undergone on the domestic scene. However, variables beyond the AKP's accession played a role as well, particularly in influencing the scope of the foreign policy changes. This section will explore in-depth the basis of the AKP's foreign policy rationale and subsequent changes in the conduct of Turkish foreign policy.

### **3.1 Strategic Depth**

Turkey's attempts to expand its foreign policy to encompass ties with non-Western actors began well before the AKP came to power in 2002.<sup>64</sup> Under President Turgut Özal, Turkey made a concerted effort to establish closer economic and diplomatic ties with the East, although the retrenchment of the Kemalist elites during the 1990s forestalled significant recalibration of Turkish foreign policy. The process received renewed impetus, however, following the 2002 accession of the AKP and their subsequent consolidation of foreign policy power. The effective marginalization of the Kemalists has granted the AKP leadership unprecedented civilian oversight and influence over the course of Turkish foreign policy, which has thus become more independent and multi-dimensional. What are the driving forces behind the evolving contours of Turkey's

---

<sup>63</sup> Hale, William. "Turkey and the Middle East in the 'New Era'." *Insight Turkey* 11.3 (2009): 143-159. P. 148-149.

<sup>64</sup> Tür, Özlem. Personal Interview, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, March 15, 2011.

foreign policy under the AKP? First and foremost is the heavily influential doctrine of “strategic depth,” a concept developed by the current Turkish FM, Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu, who became Prime Minister Erdoğan’s chief foreign-policy advisor following the November 2002 elections.<sup>65</sup>

Turkey’s new foreign policy is based on five principles. The first principle emphasizes the importance of establishing a balance between security and democracy. According to FM Davutoğlu:

If there is not a balance between security and democracy in a country, it may not have a chance to establish an area of influence in its environs.

The legitimacy of any political regime comes from its ability to provide security to its citizens; this security should not be at the expense of freedoms and human rights in the country.<sup>66</sup>

This is a clear swipe at the legacy of the Kemalists, who securitized certain issues throughout the Cold War and 1990s—most prominently in this case, PKK terrorism—to justify authoritarian governance and heavy-handed repression. The process of desecuritizing these issues—treating them as political rather than existential—has enabled the rise of the AKP and a more civilian-influenced foreign policy without hindering Turkey’s ability to effectively combat terror. Thus, FM Davutoğlu concludes that Turkey’s successes since 2002 in protecting its citizens’ security AND their liberties “support the notion that Turkey’s most important soft power is its democracy.”<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Larrabee, Stephen. “Turkey’s New Geopolitics.” *Survival* 52.2 (April/May 2010): 157-180. P. 158-59.

<sup>66</sup> Davutoğlu, Ahmet. “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007.” *Insight Turkey* 10.1 (2008): 77-96. P. 79. FM Davutoğlu lays out his five principles of Turkish foreign policy in this article.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* P. 80.

The second principle of Davutoğlu’s “strategic depth” formulation is a policy of “zero problems” with neighbors. “Zero problems” entails “a non-confrontational approach to neighboring countries and severe efforts at peacefully solving existing differences or conflicts by stressing re-conciliation and win-win policies.”<sup>68</sup> The banner of “zero problems” is behind Turkey’s closer cooperation with a range of actors including Russia, Iran, Syria, and Hamas. The problem Turkey has encountered with its zero-problems approach is that in the present geo-political climate, it is exceedingly difficult to inculcate warm relations with the aforementioned actors while maintaining good relations with the U.S., EU, Israel, and NATO. As Turkey’s regional power grows, all sides in the region are seeking to court Turkey for their own purposes, but the various sides have widely divergent foreign policy interests. Everyone wants something from Turkey, and will condemn it when it fails to deliver, including the U.S. which seeks to restore Turkey to its former role as a subordinate ally.<sup>69</sup> Although Turkey’s “zero problems” policy has triggered a fair deal of consternation in the U.S. over the emerging gaps in U.S. and Turkish foreign policy, some take a more positive view, such as Kinzer, who argues that Turkey’s increasing foreign policy activism “has led the U.S. to regenerate its relations with Turkey in a new framework.”<sup>70</sup>

The third principle is an extension of the latter principle, and focuses on further expanding Turkey’s activism beyond its traditional borders by playing a more active role in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. This principle allows Turkey two advantages. First, as Turkey solidifies its relations with the Middle East, it now has the channels in place to follow up on developments in both regions. This principle is

---

<sup>68</sup> Kramer. “AKP’s New Foreign Policy.” P. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Friedman, George. “Geopolitical Journey, Part 5: Turkey,” *Stratfor* November 23, 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Özcan and Usul. P. 114.

exemplified later on in section 3.3 on energy, whereby Turkey's success in becoming a major energy hub and transit route depends on its successful negotiations with the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Second, in addition to further expanding its activism on a state level, this principle also focuses on creating societal relationships with groups and factions within its neighbors' societies, thereby creating the ability to mediate both internal and external conflicts that may arise. Based on this principle, Turkish leaders have recently attempted to play a mediatory role in key conflicts including between Hezbollah and other Lebanese factions, between Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a groups, and between Syria and Israel, with varying degrees of success.<sup>71</sup>

The fourth principle is adherence to a multi-dimensional foreign policy. As defined by Özcan and Usul, Turkey's multi-dimensional foreign policy emphasizes Turkey's activism in the Middle East, Caucasia and Central Asia, the Balkan region and Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>72</sup> However, this multidimensional shift does not imply a shift from the conventional Western-oriented foreign policy as critics might suggest but rather solidifies Turkey's new strategy of strategic depth. Indeed, Davutoğlu puts forth that "the acceptance of Turkey's placement in the West will be more likely through the strengthening of Turkey's links to the East."<sup>73</sup> Tarik Oğuzlu adds, "Turkey is increasingly capitalizing on its Eastern identity with a view to securing its place within the West."<sup>74</sup>

The fifth principle is rhythmic diplomacy. "Turkey is the bridge between three continents as well as three different religions," President Shimon Peres of Israel told the

---

<sup>71</sup> Davutoğlu. P. 81.

<sup>72</sup> Özcan and Usul. P. 112.

<sup>73</sup> Oğuzlu, Tarik. "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?" *Turkish Studies* 9.1 (March 2008): 3-20. P. 7. For further reading, see: Michael Rubin, "Turkey, from Ally to Enemy." *Commentary* (July/August 2010): 81-86.

<sup>74</sup> Oğuzlu. P. 7.

Turkish Parliament in Ankara in 2007.<sup>75</sup> That same year, Ankara hosted President Bashar al-Assad of Syria; the Iranian Foreign Minister; the U.S. Secretary of State; and the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, France, Latvia, Iraq, Georgia, and Afghanistan.<sup>76</sup> Turkey's unique geo-political position enables it to mediate global conflicts; host high-level meetings of organizations ranging from NATO to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); and participate in the EU (as an associate member), African Union, and Arab League. Turkey's successful strategy of rhythmic diplomacy and intense diplomatic activities from 2002 to 2007 has revealed not only that Turkey's image reflects a responsible state, which provides order and security to the region, but that it is a key player in the international arena.<sup>77</sup>

### **3.2 Neo-Ottomanism**

The concept of "Strategic Depth" is part of a larger debate in Turkey about the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. While the Kemalists denigrated the role of the Ottoman Empire and saw it as a hindrance to Turkey's modernization, as discussed in Section 2.1, they were unsuccessful in severing the linkages between broader Turkish society and its Muslim/Ottoman identity. Turkey's development as a more influential actor in the Middle East since the end of the Cold War has led some scholars and commentators to label Turkey's growing assertiveness as "Neo-Ottomanism."<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. Crescent and Star: Turkey Between Two Worlds. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008. P. 213.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Davutoğlu. P. 83.

<sup>78</sup> Özcan and Usul. P. 116. According to Nur Bilge Criss, Neo-Ottomanism surfaced for the first time in the 1990's, during Turgut Özal's prime ministry and presidency. However, after his demise in 1993 the concept was dropped. With the ascendancy of the AKP in 2002, concepts of using soft power and naturalization of foreign policy as well as the further democratization of the country were revived. The AKP has used these concepts to criticize the Kemalist foreign policy, which "had severed Turkey's ties the Middle East and blocked democratization at home." İlhan Uzgel put it simply, "Neo-Ottomanism foresaw a comprehensive transformation which required a new definition of Kemalism, politics, societies, and

Today, as Turkey extends its reach into the lands of the former Ottoman territories, “a legitimizing tool for [this] redirection in behavior is found in historic references.”<sup>79</sup> FM Davutoğlu, among others, sees this Ottoman legacy as a positive building block that could enable Turkey to play a more active role in the international arena.<sup>80</sup> Özcan and Usul state that “since the main successor of the Ottomans is Turkey; there exists fertile historical ground in these former Ottoman states for Turkey to exert an influence.”<sup>81</sup> Many commentators have argued that Turkey’s attempts to invoke its historical capital in order to play a more active role in the former Ottoman environs reflect imperialist ambitions, however, Özcan and Usul offer an alternative reading that Turkey’s increased activism is actually an outgrowth of its desire to exert soft power.<sup>82</sup> In other words, Turkey is seeking to expand its political, economic, and diplomatic horizons in the former land of the Ottoman Empire, not to dominate its former territories or to reconstitute a Turkish empire.

Nonetheless, rhetoric employed by Turkish leadership containing Neo-Ottoman connotations has been ambiguous with regard to Turkey’s true intentions. For example, in a 2006 speech at a local AKP convention, then-Turkish FM Abdullah Gül, attempted to justify the visit of Khaled Mashal, Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, to Ankara by claiming that Turkey’s greatness on the regional gave it unique province to engage with all actors on the Palestinian problem.<sup>83</sup> Said Gül, “We possess all of the deeds and

---

identities. The first goal was to soften the approach to secularism, and second to solve the approach to the Kurdish problem, not with Kemalist/assimilationist measures, but through brotherhood and religion.”  
Criss, Nur Bilge. “Parameters of Turkish Foreign Policy Under the AKP Governments.” UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010): 9-22. P. 13.

<sup>79</sup> Criss. P. 12.

<sup>80</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 76.

<sup>81</sup> Özcan and Usul. P. 117.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Criss. P. 13.

archives of Palestine, Israel, Jerusalem, and all of this geography... we made a gift of all these [deeds] to Palestine last year.”<sup>84</sup> According to Criss (14), Gül implied that Turkey has a say over the former Ottoman provinces—and by extension has attempted to construct a new foreign policy—by virtue of Istanbul’s archives holding these deeds. This instance represented an imperialist interpretation of neo-Ottomanism. Conversely, a 2006 statement by Turkish State Minister Kürşad Tüzman that “the AKP government wished to cultivate a relationship with peoples that once lived in the Ottoman geography based on cooperation and respect” conveyed a soft-power approach to neo-Ottomanism.<sup>85</sup> Tüzman further emphasized “that more than thirty countries which occupy a space of twenty four million square kilometers need a strong center; and this center must be Turkey.”<sup>86</sup>

Many Turks today bristle over the application of the neo-Ottoman label to Turkey’s foreign policy due to its imperialist connotations, however, “three years ago it [the label] found a receptive audience at home when combined with historic myths, nationalism, and religion beyond sectarianism.”<sup>87</sup> However, when looking at the societal changes Turkey has undergone since the marginalization of the Kemalist elite, the neo-Ottoman label has definite utility. “Neo-Ottomanism, the revival of the intellectual legitimacy of the Ottoman empire” has taken root on the streets of most major cities in Turkey, “demonstrating the return of Ottoman culture in our [Turkey’s] social, cultural,

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. P. 14

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> In December 2009, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu claimed in an interview that he did not appreciate being labeled a Neo-Ottomanist. Professor Halil Inalcik stated, “We are not Ottomans. The Empire resided on minorities. We cannot replicate it, this is a nation state. The former was an empire.” Found in Criss. P. 14-15.

and political lives.”<sup>88</sup> Whereas public displays of Ottoman culture were not tolerated under the Kemalist elite, the Kemalists’ modernization program failed to take root among large segments of the population, who maintained their Ottoman affinity. With the Kemalists now effectively sidelined in favor of a new elite more representative of Turkish society, overt displays of Ottoman culture have become permissible again, and even “Turkish army museums now freely display the Ottoman coat of arms as part of our military/state heritage.”<sup>89</sup> The reassertion of Ottoman identity, coupled with the traditional Kemalist military and bureaucratic elites—with their exclusive westward orientation—relinquishing their grip on the foreign-policy making process, has been another key driver of Turkey’s new, multi-dimensional foreign policy.

### 3.3 Energy

Energy security is one of the main drivers of Turkey’s new foreign policy. Due to its unique geographical position, part of Turkey’s foreign policy strategy involves facilitating the transit of energy across its territory. Moreover, Turkey is the world’s 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy; between 2002 and 2008, the Turkish economy grew almost 6% annually, and its per capita GDP has almost tripled. Trade with its neighbors has doubled six times over the past seven years. The share of imports from Turkey’s near and extended neighborhood rose from 23.6% in 2002 to 35.5% in 2008. During the same period, the EU’s share in Turkey’s imports dropped from 54.7% to 40%, although the EU still accounts for 56% to 58% of Turkey’s exports.<sup>90</sup> Turkey’s new foreign policy reflects

---

<sup>88</sup> Kiniklioğlu, Suat. “The Return of Ottomanism.” *Today’s Zaman* 20 March 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Statistics in this paragraph come from: Babali, Tuncay. “Regional Energy Equations and Turkish Foreign Policy: The Middle East and the CIS.” *Insight Turkey* 12.3 (2010): 147-168. P. 149-150. For additional in-depth statistics on Turkey’s economy see Hale, William. “Economic Issues in Turkish Foreign Policy.” In: Makovsky and Sayari. P. 20-38.

a new “retroactive energy strategy responsive to regional and global dynamics” that will cut its dependency on Russian and Iranian oil and gas supplies while promoting interdependency between Turkey and its neighbors.<sup>91</sup>

Tuncay Babali puts forth two main concepts of Turkey’s new energy strategy: to ensure a diversified, reliable, and cost-effective supply for domestic consumption and to become a more effective key transit country and energy hub between the energy-producing countries to its east and the energy-consuming countries to its west.<sup>92</sup> How has Turkey been able to ensure a more diverse, reliable, and cost-effective supply of energy? Traditionally, Turkey has relied on Russia for almost two-thirds of its gas imports and about a third of its demand for crude oil.<sup>93</sup> Iran is the second largest gas supplier after Russia, with energy agreements going back between the two countries since 1996.<sup>94</sup> However, Iran, as an energy supplier has been extremely unreliable and currently only supplies Turkey with a little over half of its contracted 9.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year.<sup>95</sup> Turkey’s dependency on Russia, Iran’s failure as a reliable supplier of natural gas, and Turkey’s growing population and infrastructure have forced Turkey to seek out imports from Iraq, the Caucasus, and the Caspian regions.

Under the banner of the “zero problems with neighbors” principle, Ankara has facilitated significant cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq. This cooperation has led to 48 agreements with Iraq, ranging from energy to bilateral trade to security.<sup>96</sup> Iraq currently exports 71 million tons of oil annually to

---

<sup>91</sup> Bilgin, Mert. “Turkey’s Energy Strategy: What Difference Does it Make To Become An Energy Transit Corridor, Hub, or Center?” UNISCI Discussion Papers No. 23 (May 2010): 113-128. P. 115.

<sup>92</sup> Babali. P. 150.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. P. 157.

<sup>94</sup> Davutoğlu. P. 15.

<sup>95</sup> Babali. P. 151.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. P. 153.

Turkey through two parallel pipelines (Kirkuk-Ceyhan Crude Oil Parallel Pipelines I & II). Moreover, Turkey imports 51 millions tons of oil annually from Azerbaijan via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Crude Oil Pipeline.<sup>97</sup>

Natural gas imports have increased just as fast as oil imports. Turkey's natural gas agreements with Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iran reached 62.5 billion cubic meters (BCM) in 2008, flowing through four major pipelines (see map 1 below). Turkey imported 23 BCM from Russia (13.2 from the West Pipeline, 9.8 from Blue Stream), 4.5 BCM from Azerbaijan via the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Pipeline, and 4.1 BCM from Iran via the Tabriz-Erzurum-Ankara Pipeline.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, Turkey's goal is not only to meet its domestic demand of oil and natural gas, but also to become a more effective key transit country and energy hub between the energy-producing countries to its east and the energy-consuming countries to its west. According to Bilgin, as a result of Turkey's geographical location "Turkey has emerged as an energy transit country, yet with further aspirations to become an energy hub, and even an energy center."<sup>99</sup>

These ambitions are highly plausible given the exceedingly interrelated nature of Turkey's foreign policy with its neighbors. As Turkey negotiates to incorporate additional oil and natural gas pipelines coming from Russia, the Caucasus, the Caspian and the Middle East en route to Europe and the Mediterranean, the use of pipeline politics will reverberate towards Turkey's foreign policy goals, most notably its accession to the EU. Part of Turkey's national strategy involves the facilitating of oil and natural gas across its territory, which is central to the east-west energy corridor.<sup>100</sup> There are

---

<sup>97</sup> Bilgin. P. 121.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. P. 121-122.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. P. 114.

<sup>100</sup> Davutoğlu. P. 91.

currently numerous energy pipelines surrounding Turkey; however, there is currently only one pipeline (Turkey-Greece-Italy) that traverses Turkey bringing energy from east to west, and a second in progress (the Nabucco Pipeline) which would transport gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe via a pipeline that would run from Turkey through Romania, Hungary and Austria.<sup>101</sup>

The Turkey-Greece pipeline has been active since 2007, and will be extended to Italy after the Greece-Italy pipeline is complete in 2013. Upon completion the Turkey-Greece-Italy pipeline will have a capacity of 12 billion cubic meters (BCM).<sup>102</sup> As for the Nabucco pipeline, the most serious problem is finding sufficient gas to make the pipeline commercially viable. Thus far, only Azerbaijan has committed to supplying gas for the pipeline,<sup>103</sup> with considerations from Iraq, Iran, Turkmenistan, Qatar, and Egypt.<sup>104</sup> However, there was a major breakthrough in 2009; Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Austria signed an intergovernmental transit agreement with Turkey, thus increasing credibility with suppliers.<sup>105</sup> Upon planned completion in 2014, the Nabucco pipeline will have a capacity of bringing 31 BCM of natural gas to Europe via Turkey. Between the Turkey-Greece-Italy and Nabucco pipelines, Turkey will have the ability to transport 43 BCM to Europe, enhancing Turkey's role as a key player in the region.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Bilgin. P. 123.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

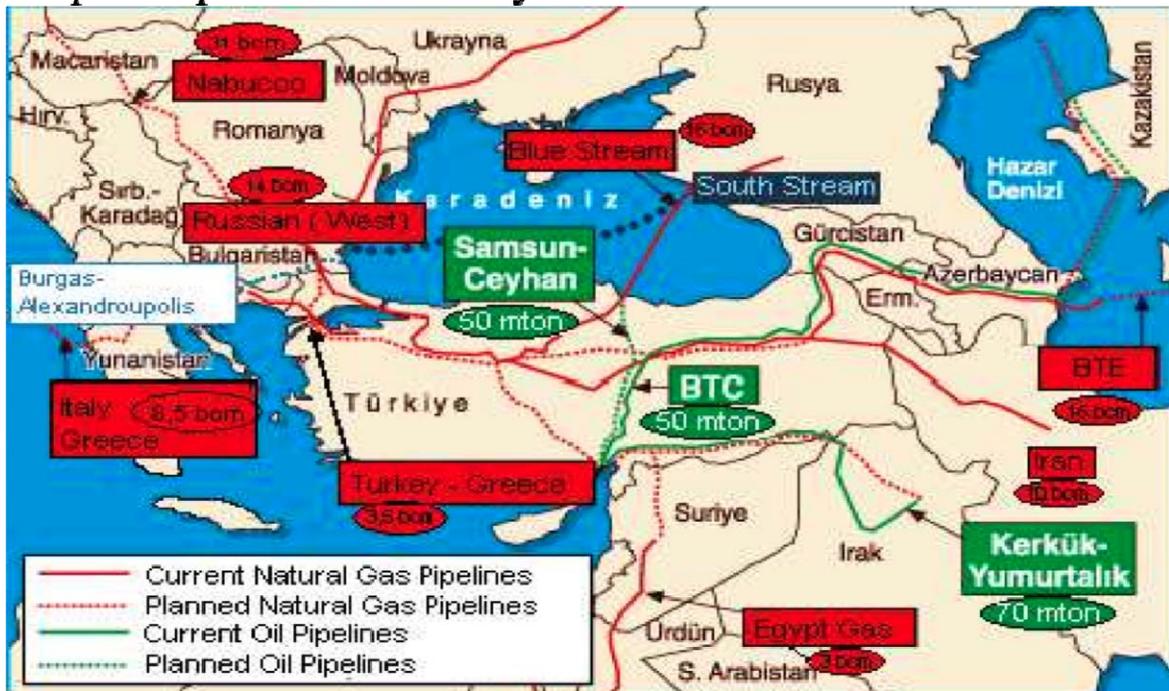
<sup>103</sup> Larrabee. P. 171.

<sup>104</sup> Bilgin. P. 123.

<sup>105</sup> Larrabee. P. 171.

<sup>106</sup> Bilgin. P. 123.

## Map 1. Pipelines in Turkey



Source: Bilgin. P. 121.

### 3.4 Islamization of Turkey's Foreign Policy

Over the past decade the strength of political Islam has moved from the fringe of society to mainstream politics in the form of the AKP. In the November 2002 elections, the AKP won 34% of the vote, followed by 46.6% of the vote in the July 2007 elections, defeating the CHP (Republican People's Party); the party representing the Kemalist secular tradition.<sup>107</sup> Despite defining itself as a “conservative democratic” party, as opposed to an Islamic party, many Turks and foreign policy analysts fear that due to the AKP's Islamic identity, its ascendancy to power poses a threat to the secular nature of the Turkish Republic.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 31. The CHP had a total 20.9 percent of the vote in alliance with the smaller, left-of-center Democratic Left Party (DSP). In 2002, the CHP won 19.4 percent of the vote, and the DSP won 1.2 percent.

<sup>108</sup> This view was expressed to the authors numerous times. During conversations and informal interviews, many Turks expressed their unhappiness and distrust with the ascendancy of the AKP. They feared the

We argue that the ascendancy of the AKP does not represent an “Islamization” of Turkish foreign policy; however, the AKP’s status as the successor to previous Islamic parties has made the AKP appear more Islamic. A brief history of the rise of the religious right is due before further analysis of the question at hand. As discussed in section 2.2, the neoliberal reforms carried out by Prime Minister Turgut Özal in the mid 1980’s created a new class of industrialists and businessmen with strong Islamic roots, the “Anatolian tigers”. Subsequently, the success of the “Anatolian tigers” contributed to an upsurge in the political strength of already existing Islamic parties, the first of which was the National Order Party (MNP), led by Necmettin Erbakan, which advocated a new economic and social order based on national (Islamic) principles. Formed in January 1970, the MNP was closed down after one-year by military intervention.<sup>109</sup>

Shortly after, in 1972, the National Salvation Party (MSP) was formed on a platform combining Islam and Turkish Nationalism—also led by Erbakan. The MSP, consisting of a coalition of different Islamic and conservative groups, established itself as an important actor in Turkish politics in the 1970s. However, after the military coup in 1980, the MSP was closed down and Erbakan and his associates were banned from public politics for ten years.<sup>110</sup> In 1983, MSP reemerged in public politics as the Welfare Party (RP), adapting a different ideology. The RP “emphasized the need for greater social justice, equality, and to end undue western influences,” and pushed for new policies

---

AKP had a hidden agenda to Islamize Turkish society. They also expressed a concern that Turkey’s increased relations with other Muslim countries may eventually lead to Turkey’s separation from the modern West, which they identified with more closely than the East. It must be noted that our polling sample was by no means scientific and does not accurately represent a comprehensive cross-section of Turkish society. (Ankara and Istanbul, March 2011).

<sup>109</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 36-40.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. P. 41.

distancing Turkey from the West while solidifying its relationship with other Muslim countries.<sup>111</sup>

In 1995 the Welfare Party won the national elections, with Erbakan as Prime Minister. As Rabasa and Larrabee put forth (42), “for the first time since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkey was run by an Islamist Party, with an Islamist Prime Minister.” However, once in office, the RP was unable to appease Islamic supporters and a secular Turkish society. Ultimately, Erbakan was forced out by the military and the National Security Council (NSC) in June 1997, and in January 1998, the Welfare Party was closed and Erbakan was banned from public politics for another five years. Rabasa and Larrabee suggested (45-46) that the only way Islamists could succeed in Turkish politics was by deemphasizing their religious agenda and focusing more on promoting western political values such as “democracy, human rights, and relations with the West.” This new ideology, or path towards winning popular support, was soon picked up by a younger group of reformists, led by the then-mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his associate Abdullah Gül—forming the Virtue Party (FP), the successor to the Welfare Party.

The formation of the FP under the leadership of Erdoğan and Gül marked a momentous shift in Turkish politics. After being shut down by the Constitutional Court in June 2001, the movement split. The traditionalists established the Felicity Party (SP), under the formal leadership of Recai Kutan, with Erbakan playing a major role behind the scenes. The reformists founded the AKP, with Erdoğan as Chairman. There were two unique differences between the two parties’ ideologies. The Felicity Party’s anti-western

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. P. 42.

ideology “regarded Islam as incompatible with western values,”<sup>112</sup> while the founders of the AKP emphasized western political values and its loyalty to Turkey’s secular constitution. Therefore, despite many of its leaders Islamic roots, the ascendancy to power not only represents a re-Islamization of Turkey’s foreign policy towards the east, but also a westernization of Turkey’s foreign policy towards the west—both have been present in the AKP’s rhetoric, actions and foreign policy.<sup>113</sup>

### **3.5 Turkey’s Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East**

Turkey’s new engagement with the Middle East at the expense of its traditional alignments with the West has caused much consternation as to whether Turkey is “changing sides.” The authors’ assessment of Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy does not suggest that Turkey intends to turn its back on the West, however, it is clear that Turkey’s new pro-activism in the region falls in line with many aspects of FM Davutoğlu’s grand strategy, which according to Nur Bilge Criss is nothing more than populism wrapped in concepts such as “strategic depth,” “zero problems with neighbors,” “pro-activism,” “geographical centralism” and “soft balancing.”<sup>114</sup> Turkey’s newly formed relations with Middle Eastern countries are a result of these principles, however, it by no means “suggests a break with the West, but rather a growing salience of the Middle East in Turkey’s relations with the West.”<sup>115</sup>

The rise of the AKP has brought concerns to the West over its possibly harboring a hidden Islamic agenda. As previously stated, the AKP leadership rose from the ranks of former Islamic parties, however, despite its Islamic roots, the AKP learned that it had to

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. P. 46.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. P. 44-47.

<sup>114</sup> Criss. P. 10.

<sup>115</sup> Oğuzlu, 3.

adapt its policies to both the domestic and international arenas by quelling its Islamic agenda and placing more of an emphasis on human rights, democracy, and modernization.<sup>116</sup> We are not suggesting zero Islamic agenda within AKP's foreign policy, but that the new direction in AKP's foreign policy "should be understood within the context of the AKP's Islamic agenda,"<sup>117</sup> which according to an AKP official "is not *whether* Islam influences politics, but *how* it influences politics."<sup>118</sup>

Despite the AKP coming to power on an Islamic platform, its foreign policy has not only revealed a strengthening of relations with the Middle East but also a deepening of relations with the U.S. and the EU. As Özcan and Usul put forth, it is in Turkey's best interest to consolidate its power, prestige, and influence in the Middle East, thereby becoming more geographically important to the U.S. and the EU, thus making Turkey a better candidate for accession to the EU and it becoming "more difficult for the EU to refuse Turkey membership."<sup>119</sup> This view of Turkey's significant geostrategic position is shared by FM Davutoğlu, who stated that it "disappoints and surprises us [Turkey] in the EU's inability to grasp this vision."<sup>120</sup> Additionally, Turkey has become aware that its proximity to the growing chaos and instability in the Middle East might have contributed to the EU's reluctance to accept Turkish membership. Therefore, it is in Turkey's best interest to help foster a more stable environment in the region.<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, Turkey's relations with the EU and the U.S. have increasingly become informed by developments in the Middle East.<sup>122</sup> Tarik Oğuzlu suggests that the "Middle

---

<sup>116</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 51.

<sup>117</sup> Özcan and Usul. 110.

<sup>118</sup> Rabasa and Larrabee. P. 54.

<sup>119</sup> Özcan and Usul. P. 111.

<sup>120</sup> Davutoğlu. P. 92.

<sup>121</sup> Oğuzlu. P. 15-16.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. P. 3.

Easternization [of Turkey's foreign policy] does not suggest a break with the West but rather the growing salience of the Middle East in Turkey's relations with the West...result[ing] in the adoption of a more pragmatic/rational approach rather than the emotional/romantic approach toward the EU and the United States."<sup>123</sup> While this may be the case, the shift in Turkey's foreign policy still causes considerable concern to Western leaders, especially since Turkey's growing ties with regimes shunned by the West such as Iran, Syria, Sudan and Hamas could undermine Western foreign policy objectives.<sup>124</sup>

Despite these concerns, Western leaders praise and often promote Turkey's new activism in the region. The European Commission's 2009 progress report called Turkey's Arab-Israeli engagement "constructive;" Spain's Foreign Minister cited Turkey's Middle East activism as a reason why it would be a useful member of the European family; Germany judged that "Turkey is not only an anchor of stability in its neighborhood, but also an exporter of stability;"<sup>125</sup> and American President Obama and Turkish President Gül see the U.S.-Turkish relationship as "above and beyond everything else."<sup>126</sup>

#### **4. TURKISH-SYRIAN RELATIONS**

At this juncture, we turn to our case-study of Turkish-Syrian relations. Turkey's evolving relations with Syria fit into the context of the aforementioned changes in Turkey's relations with the broader Middle East, but also reflect developments unique to the bilateral context. We chose to focus on Turkey's relations with Syria due to the complexity of the dynamics of Syria's strategic alignment. Although it is presently a member of the "resistance axis" along with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, we gauge its

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. P. 3.

<sup>124</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East." P. 27.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. P. 28.

<sup>126</sup> Han, P. 100.

membership to be more a result of pragmatic than ideological considerations. Syria has clear interests which are dependent on closer cooperation with the West, namely recovery of the Golan Heights through a negotiated settlement with Israel, pacification of Iraq, and “structural reforms that the regime almost certainly cannot undertake without Western help and a more pacified regional environment.”<sup>127</sup> By virtue of its strong relations with Syria and the West, Turkey can play a unique mediatory role in facilitating closer cooperation between the two sides. However, given Turkey’s growing obsequiousness in its relations with the West, the question arises: will Turkey moderate Syria’s foreign policy, or will Syria radicalize Turkey’s?

#### **4.1 Historical Background**

From the 1970’s until 1998, Turkey and Syria were locked in a relationship shaped by historical enmity, bitter border disputes, disagreements over water rights, and the fact that they joined different camps during the Cold War, with Turkey in the NATO camp and Syria aligned with the Soviet Union. In 1998, the escalation of nationalist sentiment in Turkey, domestic uncertainties in Syria, Russia’s withdrawal from Middle East politics, and the suitability of the international environment provided Turkey with the opportunity to take military action against Syria to capture the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, and his associates, who were supported and given sanction by the Syrian government since 1979.<sup>128</sup> As Turkish military leaders ushered in a state of ‘undeclared war,’ massing 10,000 troops along the Turkish-Syrian border, tensions between Turkey and Syria grew. Successful mediation by Egyptian, Iranian and Jordanian officials helped defuse the crisis, ultimately culminating in the signing of the

---

<sup>127</sup> “Reshuffling the Cards? (I): Syria’s Evolving Strategy,” International Crisis Group, Middle East Report 92 (December 14, 2009). P. i.

<sup>128</sup> Aras and Polat. P. 509.

Adana Accords—in which Syrian President Assad deported Öcalan, Turkey increased water flow to Syria, and the dispute over Hatay was temporarily put on the backburner—in 1998,<sup>129</sup> enabling a rapid improvement in bilateral relations.<sup>130</sup>

## 4.2 Relationship Drivers

There are three main drivers that fostered Turkish-Syrian bilateral relations after the signing of the Adana Accords: the 2003 Iraq War, Turkey's ability to play the mediator role between Israel and Syria, and economic cooperation. The most important driver pushing Turkey closer to Syria is security. The U.S. military presence in Iraq, which from Ankara's perspective could lead to the partition of Iraq and pave the way for an independent Kurdish state, has pushed Ankara and Damascus to adopt more cooperative relations.

From Syria's perspective, "rapprochement with Turkey could provide an important channel of access to the wider world" as Syria was becoming more isolated by the U.S. presence in Iraq. Moreover, what alarmed both Turkey and Syria is that their Kurdish population might be encouraged to rebel, if the Kurds in Iraq declare independence.<sup>131</sup> The above was also mentioned by Özlem Tür in a personal interview with the authors, and she added that not only was Turkey concerned about a possible Kurdish uprising in Turkey but also for the safety of the Turkomen in Northern Iraq upon

---

<sup>129</sup> The Adana Accords is a security agreement between Turkey and Syria, which stipulated the end of Syria's support for the PKK and subsequently Turkey's agreement to increase the water flow of the Euphrates to Syria. It is important to mention that the Adana Accords were a turning point in Turkish-Syrian relations; almost instantly political and economical ties between the two countries began to emerge. Aydın, Mustafa, and Damla Aras. "Political Conditionality of Economic Relations Between Paternalist States: Turkey's Interaction With Iran, Iraq, and Syria," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 27.1&2 (Winter/Spring 2005): 21-43. P. 25.

<sup>130</sup> Bashar Assad eventually accepted Hatay as a part of Turkey in 2004. Tür, Özlem. "Turkish-Syrian Relations-Where Are We Going?" *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 23 (May 2010): 163-176. P. 167.

<sup>131</sup> Oktav, Özden Zeynep. "The Limits of Change: Turkey, Iran, Syria." In: Guney, Nursin Atesoglu, ed. *Contentious Issues of Security and the Future of Turkey*. GBR: Ashgate Publishing, 2007. P. 87-88.

independence. Moreover, she expressed that both Turkey and Syria were concerned with the impact of the Bush Doctrine on the region, which the Turkish left perceived as imperialism; the right perceived as anti-nationalist; and the Islamists perceived as a crusade.<sup>132</sup>

A second driver that helped forge a better relationship between both countries is Turkey's role under the AKP as a "facilitator, mediator and conveyor of rival parties in several regional conflicts."<sup>133</sup> In line with FM Davutoğlu's fifth principle of Turkey's new foreign policy—rhythmic diplomacy—the AKP began playing the role of mediator after the U.S. led Iraq War in 2003 by organizing meeting of Sunni Muslim leaders in Iraq in an attempt to bring them into the new American-brokered order. AKP leaders have also tried to lessen tensions between the U.S. and Iran, Iraq and Syria, Israel and Syria, Israel and the Palestinians, Hamas and Fatah, and numerous actors in Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>134</sup>

In 2008 Turkey facilitated indirect talks between Israel and Syria, aiming to pave the way for direct negotiations for a peace deal and return of the Golan Heights. Although unsuccessful, the direct talks between Turkey and Syria brought great trust between both parties, further solidifying their relationship. This improvement of relations with Syria has been accompanied by a sharp deterioration of Turkey's relations with Israel.<sup>135</sup> The AKP and the Netanyahu government have deep differences over a number of key issues such as Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Conversely, according to Özlem Tür, "the mediation effort [by Turkey] is especially important in

---

<sup>132</sup> Tür, Personal Interview.

<sup>133</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East." P. 14.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

showing the level of trust between Syria and Turkey.”<sup>136</sup> These feelings were reiterated by Syrian President Bashar Assad, stating in an interview, “that they [Syria] value Turkey’s support of Syria highly and that Turkey could communicate Syria’s message to any party;” he further stated, “We have full trust for Turkey.”<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, “it seems unlikely that Turkey can resume its role with the current Israeli government” despite Syria insisting on a resumption of the Turkish role in mediation between both parties.<sup>138</sup>

The third driver of Turkish-Syrian relations is economics. Almost immediately following the Adana Accords, booming economic links began falling in place. In 1999 an aide to Syrian Prime Minister, Salim Yassin visited Turkey resulting in the reactivation of the Joint Economic Commission. It met in May 2000 in Damascus where a memorandum of understanding was signed, stipulating that the Joint Economic Commission would start working; a special council would be established to allow Syrian and Turkish businessmen to meet; relations between chambers of commerce of the two countries would increase; and agreements on the protection of reciprocal investments and on the prevention of double taxation would be signed. In 2000 Syria embarked on a new structural reforms program for its economy by investing in industry, oil, natural resources, agricultural, and tourism projects, thus providing new opportunities for Turkish companies, which invested heavily.<sup>139</sup>

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 not only brought Turkey and Syria closer due to security concerns as stated earlier; it was a catalyst for increased trade between the two countries. Due to the loss of trade and trade routes within Iraq, Turkey was forced to look

---

<sup>136</sup> Tür, “Turkish-Syrian Relations.” P. 171.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. P. 171.

<sup>138</sup> “Turkey and the Middle East.” P. 15.

<sup>139</sup> Aydin and Aras. P. 34-35.

toward Syria as an opening to the Gulf market while Syria utilized Turkey for access to the European market.<sup>140</sup> Despite U.S. pressure to distance themselves from their southern neighbor, the U.S. led war in Iraq only helped solidify Turkish-Syrian economic relations. By 2010, 51 trade protocols had been signed by both parties resulting in a trade volume of over \$4 billion.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, economic cooperation also led to joint military exercises, signing of a technical military cooperation agreement, the establishment of a Turkish-Syrian Strategic Cooperation Council and abolished visa requirements between borders in 2009.<sup>142</sup>

Bearing these developments in mind, we now return to the question posed at the beginning of this section of whether Syria is leading Turkey into the “resistance” camp or whether Turkey is having a moderating influence on Syria. The results thus far are inconclusive; there are developments which give cause for optimism—such as Turkish mediation efforts with Syria on the Israeli and Iraqi fronts—and some which give rise to pessimism—such as Turkey’s cancellation of trilateral U.S.-Israeli-Turkish military exercises in October 2009 and subsequent decision to conduct military training with Syria instead.<sup>143</sup> What has changed is the U.S.’s perspective on Turkish-Syrian ties. The Bush administration sought to isolate Syria and thus viewed Turkey’s rapprochement with suspicion. By contrast, the Obama administration has premised his Syrian strategy on engagement and a more conciliatory approach, and thus views Turkish-Syrian relations with cautious optimism. The fact is that Turkey attempts to straddle both sides of the

---

<sup>140</sup> Tür. Personal Interview.

<sup>141</sup> Larrabee. P. 166.

<sup>142</sup> Tür. “Turkish-Syrian Relations.” P. 163.

<sup>143</sup> Schenker, David. “Syria and Turkey: Walking Arm and Arm Down the Same Road?” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Jerusalem Issue Briefs 9.13 (December 1, 2009). P. 1.

fence, and thus far has not had to firmly orient its strategic alignment one way or the other. This practice will in all likelihood prove unsustainable in the long term. The challenge facing U.S. policymakers is to ensure that when Turkey inevitably faces choices between moderation and extremism, it chooses moderation. The next section offers prescriptions for ensuring optimal outcomes.

## **5. PRESCRIPTIONS**

Turkey's rapprochement with Syria and the broader Middle East presents a host of challenges, and opportunities, to U.S. policymakers. Rather than falling victim to fears about "losing Turkey," the U.S. should adopt a strategy based on embracing Turkey's attempts to integrate into the Middle East and engender stability. Ankara's initiatives, such as diplomatic overtures to Iran and Hamas, may at times be at odds with U.S. wishes, but ultimately its NATO membership and its relationship with the U.S. remain pillars of its foreign policy.<sup>144</sup> Because of its geopolitical position as a bridge between East and West, it is only natural that Turkey would seek a foreign policy that enables it to straddle this divide. With the proper strategy on the table, we can ensure that Turkey's ambition to integrate into its own neighborhood is not a zero-sum equation; effective engagement with its neighbors can actually redound to our benefit and increase Turkey's strategic value to the West.

A key feature of Turkey's "strategic depth" foreign policy is the abandonment of Turkey's exclusive Westward orientation. The Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) leadership eschews the Kemalist "over-obsession with Turkey's Western identity and trajectory"<sup>145</sup> which was the dominant feature of Turkey's foreign policy from

---

<sup>144</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East." P. i.

<sup>145</sup> Kramer. "AKP's New Foreign Policy." P. 5.

dissolution of the Ottoman Empire through the end of the Cold War. Instead, the AKP seeks to broaden the country's economic and political horizons in all directions for the sake of Turkish interests while first and foremost shoring up the security and welfare of the Turkish state. In practice, this frees up Turkey to pursue policies which are not always "fully compatible with the basic lines of 'Western' policy."<sup>146</sup>

To what does Turkey owe its new-found foreign policy independence? First, it is emerging as an economic power. Turkey has displayed one of the highest sustained rates of economic growth over the past decade, making it one of the world's 20 largest economies.<sup>147</sup> Seeking to protect and further inculcate its economic growth, it has sought to stabilize its own backyard, the Middle East, first. It has thus normalized ties with Syria and the new Iraqi Coalition Government; expanded energy and trade ties with Iran; and facilitated regional efforts to reduce conflicts, integrate infrastructure, forge strategic relationships, and engage in multilateral regional platforms.<sup>148</sup> Economic imperatives have catalyzed a shift in Turkey's foreign policy priorities away from hard security concerns to soft power and commercial interests. Turkey no longer perceives itself as a "kind of NATO backed regional gendarme," but rather as "a more independent player determined to use a host of regional integration tools in order to be taken more seriously on its own account."<sup>149</sup>

Washington has largely failed to contend with the evolving contours of Turkish foreign policy. The State Department's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2007-2012 lists

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. P. 6.

<sup>147</sup> Gordon, Philip H., Assistant Secretary of European and Eurasian Affairs. "The United States and Turkey: A View from the Obama Administration." Transcript of Lecture Presented at the Brookings Institution (March 17, 2010). P. 8.

<sup>148</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East." P. i.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

“anchoring Turkey in Europe”<sup>150</sup> as an objective of its strategy, yet success on this front has been elusive. At this juncture, we will examine the contours of what we ideally envision as the future of U.S.-Turkish relations. Anchoring Turkey in Europe remains the central objective. By doing so, we would ideally gain the following practical benefits:

Turkish troops in Afghanistan. Freer NATO naval access to the Black Sea to bolster Ukrainian and Georgian morale. Turkish help for Georgia. A pro-U.S. Turkish flanking threat to distract Iran. Ditto Syria. The continued flow of non-Arab, non-Russian oil from Azerbaijan to the world. Increased U.S.-friendly Turkish influence in Central Asia's Turkic states to counteract Russian and Iranian influence (remember those U.S. bases?). A secular Muslim buffer in the region against Islamization.<sup>151</sup>

A Turkey anchored in Europe, acting in lockstep with U.S. objectives, would be a powerful pro-Western counterbalance against pernicious forces such as Islamist extremism, anti-Americanism, and the pro-Iranian “resistance” axis.

So long as Turkey remains “anchored” in the West, the U.S. should remain supportive of its more active engagement in its own neighborhood. A strong pro-Western Turkey can serve as a force for conflict mitigation in the Lebanese and the Israeli-Arab theaters, can provide a stable ally to the fledgling Iraqi government, and can raise the Middle East's economic profile through free trade agreements and integration of infrastructure. However, we would wish to see it loosen its cooperative ties with pernicious actors such as Iran and Hamas.

---

<sup>150</sup> “Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2007-2012,” US Department of State, US Agency for International Development, Revised May 7, 2007. P. 48.

<sup>151</sup> Kaylan, Melik. “Why Turkey Matters to the U.S.” Forbes March 17, 2009.

What are the levers we can bring to bear in order to attain this desired outcome? Turkey is still reliant to a large extent on military and intelligence cooperation with the U.S. and NATO. The main stick we can wield is warning Turkey that counterproductive steps such as incitement against Israel, providing support to radical Islamist movements like Hamas, and frustrating our efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear ambitions could jeopardize this cooperation in the future. There are a number of inducements we can offer Turkey to attain its cooperation. We cannot guarantee Turkey EU accession, but we can press upon our European allies to expand trade with Turkey and increase diplomatic and economic engagement with Turkey in return for "good behavior." We can expand energy cooperation with Turkey on the condition that Turkish pipelines do not serve as a transit point for Iranian oil and gas. There is no panacea to ensuring Turkey's Westward realignment, but by stressing the benefits it stands to gain in terms of military, intelligence, trade, and energy cooperation, we may be able to "induce, persuade, negotiate, and confront Ankara where necessary into maintaining its shared interests, traditional alliances, and existing responsibilities."<sup>152</sup>

Turkey's strategic drift from the west has coincided with the AKP's strengthening its grip on Turkey's foreign and domestic politics. Absent the restoration of the Kemalist elites to their historically dominant role within the foreign power arena, the era of Turkey as a pliant U.S. ally has effectively ended. The U.S. cannot meddle in Turkey's domestic politics, but it can condemn illiberal measures employed by the AKP to change the rules of the game, such as crackdowns on the press and NGO sector, and summary arrests of military elites. Nevertheless, all the literature we have read and field interviews we have

---

<sup>152</sup> McNamara, Cohen, and Phillips, P. 17.

conducted indicate that the domestic reforms undertaken by the AKP to sideline Kemalist influence are permanent.

Therefore, the U.S. must plan for the eventuality that the AKP will consolidate its gains further in the upcoming June 2011 Parliamentary elections. Because the AKP is likely the force in Turkish politics that we must engage with in the future, the goal of U.S. policymakers should be to lie out in practical terms that constructive engagement with the West will yield positive benefits, while continued intransigence will provoke significant costs. If a compelling case can be made that profound military, intelligence, trade, and energy cooperation with the West are more desirable than the fleeting benefits it will receive in terms of prestige among Turkish and Arab publics and closer relations with Iran and Russia, then the U.S.-Turkish strategic partnership can continue to flourish. At times Washington has taken Turkey for granted as an ally and Turkey would like to believe it does not need the U.S., but the reality of the situation is that both sides need each other and benefit tremendously from strategic cooperation.

The strategy the U.S. should pursue going forward is to reset the balance of U.S.-Turkish relations and firmly anchor Turkey within the Western sphere. We must be frank with Turkey about the consternation its enhanced relations with Iran, Syria, Russia, and Hamas have caused us. Rather than trying to paper over such gaps in our foreign policy objectives, we must utilize a broad range of inducements, and punishments when necessary, to cajole Turkey into loosening its cooperation with these actors while strengthening its engagement with the U.S., EU, Israel, and NATO. We must continue to monitor heavy handed tactics employed by the AKP to change the rules of Turkey's domestic game, and register our protest in multilateral fora when such abuses occur.

We cannot dictate the terms of Turkey's engagement with the West, but we also cannot permit Turkey to conduct regional diplomacy which stokes and preys upon populist anti-Western sentiment without consideration for its Western allies and partners.<sup>153</sup> The U.S. should work to mitigate such sentiment, particularly within Turkey, through strategic public diplomacy outreach efforts. Combating Islamist populism is a two-way street, however, and we must impress upon the AKP that they will face serious consequences in terms of losing military and intelligence cooperation if they continue steps such as incitement against Israel, engaging with Hamas, and frustrating our efforts to isolate Iran.

Turkey desires to be taken seriously on the regional and international stage, and we should support this vision, but on terms favorable to us. To that effect, the threat of punitive measures should remain on the table, but the U.S. should rely more heavily on inducements as the path to building a mutually beneficial partnership. We should work in concert with Europe to expand its trade and diplomacy with Ankara, and to reinvigorate the stalled EU accession process. The State Department should provide diplomatic support for energy cooperation projects with Turkey, especially on the Nabucco, Turkmenistan–Azerbaijani, and Iraq–Turkey gas pipelines, but only on the grounds that no Iranian oil or gas passes through these pipelines.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

By implementing the above strategic plan, we hope to recalibrate Turkey's foreign policy by sweetening the pot in terms of choosing engagement with the West. Turkey's desire to emerge from Washington's shadow and play a more active role in its neighborhood poses challenges to the conduct of Washington's Middle Eastern policy. If

---

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

we succeed in anchoring Turkey firmly in our court however, these challenges transform into opportunities. A Turkey that acts on behalf of U.S. interests in its regional dealings can contribute to success in our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, in our efforts to mitigate conflicts within the Lebanese and Arab-Israeli theaters, in our efforts to stem the tide against Islamist extremism and anti-American sentiment, and in our efforts to frustrate Iran's nuclear ambitions.

If we succeed in "converting" Turkey, then the U.S.-Turkish relationship can be restored to its rightful place as a linchpin of our overarching regional strategy. The challenges we face in securing AKP cooperation are myriad, but by couching the matter in practical terms we may be able to overcome their tendencies to play to populist sentiment. The reality of the situation is that Turkey needs the U.S. and the U.S. needs Turkey. By premising our future engagements with Turkey on the strategy we have laid out, we can replenish the U.S.-Turkish strategic partnership and enable it to flourish going forward.

## Works Cited

- Aktay, Yasin. "Politics at Home, Politics in the World: The Return of the Political in Turkish Foreign Policy." Mediterranean Quarterly 21.1 (Winter 2010): 61-75.
- Aras, Bulent, and Rabia Karakaya Polat. "From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran." Security Dialogue 39.5 (October 2008): 495-515.
- Aydin, Mustafa, and Damla Aras. "Political Conditionality of Economic Relations Between Paternalist States: Turkey's Interaction With Iran, Iraq, and Syria." Arab Studies Quarterly 27.1&2 (Winter/Spring 2005): 21-43.
- Babali, Tuncay. "Regional Energy Equations and Turkish Foreign Policy: The Middle East and the CIS." Insight Turkey 12.3 (2010): 147-168.
- Bacik, Gokhan. "The Rise of Identity Politics in Turkey." UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010): 47-60.
- Bilgin, Mert. "Turkey's Energy Strategy: What Difference Does it Make to Become an Energy Transit Corridor, Hub, or Center?" UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010): 113-128.
- Cagaptay, Soner. "Why Turkey Will Emerge as the Leader of the Muslim World." Hurriyet Daily News November 21, 2010.  
<<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1541>>
- Carpenter, J. Scott, and Soner Cagaptay. "Regenerating the U.S.-Turkey Partnership." The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Notes 2 (November 2010): 1-14.
- Criss, Nur Bilge. "Parameters of Turkish Foreign Policy Under the AKP Governments." UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010): 9-22.
- Dağı, İhsan. "The JDP: Identity, Politics, and Discourse." In: Yavuz, M. Hakan, ed. The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and The AK Parti. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, Utah Series in Turkish and Islamic Studies, 2006.
- Davutoğlu, Ahmet. "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." Insight Turkey 10.1 (2008): 77-96.
- Friedman, George. "Geopolitical Journey, Part 5: Turkey," Stratfor November 23, 2010.  
<[http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20101122\\_geopolitical\\_journey\\_part\\_5\\_turkey](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20101122_geopolitical_journey_part_5_turkey)>
- Fuller, Graham. The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008.

- Gordon, Philip H., Assistant Secretary of European and Eurasian Affairs. "The United States and Turkey: A View from the Obama Administration." Transcript of Lecture Presented at the Brookings Institution (March 17, 2010).
- Hale, William. "Economic Issues in Turkish Foreign Policy." In: Makovsky, Alan, and Sabri Sayari, eds. Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy. Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000.
- Hale, William. "Turkey and the Middle East in the 'New Era'." Insight Turkey 11.3 (2009): 143-159.
- Han, Ahmet K. "From 'Strategic Partnership' to 'Model Partnership': AKP, Turkish-US Relations, and the Prospects under Obama." UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010): 77-112.
- Kasaba, Reşat and Sibel Bazdoğan. "Turkey at a Crossroad." Journal of International Affairs 54.1 (Fall 2000): 1-20.
- Karaosmanoğlu, Ali L. "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey." Journal of International Affairs 54.1 (Fall 2000): 199-216.
- Kaylan, Melik. "Why Turkey Matters to the U.S." Forbes March 17, 2009.  
< <http://www.forbes.com/2009/03/16/obama-turkey-summit-opinions-columnists-erdogan.html>>
- Kiniklioğlu, Suat. "The Return of Ottomanism." Today's Zaman 20 March 2007.  
<<http://www.todayszaman.com/columnists-105869-the-return-of-ottomanism.html>>
- Kinzer, Stephen. Crescent and Star: Turkey between Two Worlds. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008.
- . Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future. New York: Times Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2010.
- Kirişçi, Kemal. "Turkey and the Muslim Middle East." In: Makovsky, Alan and Sabri Sayari, eds. Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy. Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000.
- Kramer, Heinz. A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000.
- . "AKP's 'New' Foreign Policy between Vision and Pragmatism." German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Working Paper. (June 2010): 1-41.

- Larrabee, Stephen. "Turkey's New Geopolitics." Survival 52.2 (April/May 2010): 157-180.
- McElroy, Damien. "Turkey Objects to NATO Missile Shield Targeting Iran." Telegraph October 18, 2010.  
< <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/8071659/Turkey-objects-to-Nato-missile-shield-targeting-Iran.html>>
- McNamara, Sally, Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., and James Phillips. "Countering Turkey's Strategic Drift." The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder 2442, (July 26, 2010): 1-18.
- Oğuzlu, Tarik. "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?" Turkish Studies 9.1 (March 2008): 3-20.
- Oktav, Özden Zeynep. "The Limits of Change: Turkey, Iran, Syria." In: Guney, Nursin Atesoglu, ed. Contentious Issues of Security and the Future of Turkey. GBR: Ashgate Publishing, 2007.
- Özcan, Gencer. "The Changing Role of Turkey's Military in Foreign Policy Making." UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010): 23-46.
- Özcan, Mesut, and Ali Resul Usul. "Understanding the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Changes within Continuity Is Turkey Departing from the West?" Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politiki 6.21 (2010): 109-133.
- Özer, Dinçer. "Syria and Turkey Relations: The Changing Face of Turkish Foreign Policy." Fatih University, Civilacademy Journal of Social Sciences 5.3 (2007): 15-30.
- Rabasa, Angel and F. Stephen Larrabee. The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey. RAND Corporation National Defense Research Institute, 2008.
- "Reshuffling the Cards? (I): Syria's Evolving Strategy," International Crisis Group, Middle East Report 92 (December 14, 2009).
- Rubin, Michael. "Turkey, From Ally to Enemy." Commentary (July/August 2010): 81-86.
- Schenker, David. "Syria and Turkey: Walking Arm and Arm Down the Same Road?" Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Jerusalem Issue Briefs 9.13 (December 1, 2009).
- Tür, Özlem. Personal Interview, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, March 15, 2011.

---. "Turkish-Syrian Relations-Where Are We Going?" UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010): 163-176.

"Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints." International Crisis Group, Europe Report 203 (April 7, 2010).

Uzgel, İlhan. "Between Praetorianism and Democracy: The Role of the Military in Turkish Foreign Policy." The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations 34 (2003): 177-211.

Walker, Joshua W. "The United States and Turkey: Can They Agree to Disagree?" Brandeis University Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Middle East Brief, 46 (November 2010): 1-7.

---. "Will Turkey Remain an American Ally?" Providence Journal, December 2, 2010. < [http://www.projo.com/opinion/contributors/content/CT\\_turkey2\\_12-02-10\\_9PL7KS2\\_v9.3f6d9c0.html](http://www.projo.com/opinion/contributors/content/CT_turkey2_12-02-10_9PL7KS2_v9.3f6d9c0.html)>

Yavuz, M. Hakan. "Cleansing Islam From the Public Sphere." Journal of International Affairs 54.1 (Fall 2000): 21-42.