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# Theorizing the Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy

KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT\*

**ABSTRACT** *The transformation of Turkish foreign policy has become a closely followed subject, fueling important debates on the underlying reasons, resources, actors, outcomes, and nature of the policy progress. This change has also introduced new challenges to those who have adopted generic models to understand and explain Turkish foreign policy. This article will examine and discuss the main causes that have complicated the study of Turkish foreign policy during this period, such as simultaneous changes in the nature and conceptualization of the international system –the end of the unipolar world, the emergence of new power centers - and domestic transformations in Turkey, including active civilian control of military, the emergence of an attentive public opinion in foreign policy.*

**A**s the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) completes a decade in power, one of the most remarkable developments during its tenure has been the adoption of a new and pro-active understanding of foreign policy. The transformation of Turkish foreign policy has become a closely followed focal point, fueling important debates on the underlying reasons, resources, actors, outcomes, and nature of the policy progress. This change has also introduced new challenges to those who have adopted generic models to understand and explain Turkish foreign policy. While observers of Turkish foreign policy have often faced difficulties in following this transformation, academic circles have vigorously tried to formulate models to represent the new nature of Turkish foreign policymaking. This article will examine and discuss the main causes that have complicated the study of Turkish foreign policy during this period. Changes in the nature and conceptualization of the international system – such as the end of the unipolar world, the emergence of new power centers in international relations and domestic transformations in Turkey, including increasing democratization, the emergence of an assertive and attentive public opinion in foreign policy, and dramatic shifts in deci-

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## One of the most remarkable developments during AK Party's tenure has been the adoption of pro-active understanding of foreign policy

sion-making mechanisms – will be emphasized as the most significant causes of the difficulty to study Turkish foreign policy during the AK Party decade.

When trying to understand the main causes of Turkish foreign policy's transformation in the last decade, scholars have focused on different mechanisms and factors, resulting in a relatively complex literature. This complexity was the joint outcome of significant changes in different levels of international relations and existing difficulties in studying foreign policy changes, such as a lack of significant methodological and theoretical tools in this field. Although it was not stated exclusively, the first decade of the new millennium was a “long decade” in terms of its impact on the international system, as well as in terms of the developments in Turkish politics and foreign policy. For example, what was expected to be a long, unipolar international system has lasted for only a moment and the US' dominance of the 1990s was challenged from different angles. Particularly, following the war in Iraq and the US' economic meltdown in 2008, scholars of international relations have tried to replace the concept of “unipolarity” with alternatives. During this period, the greatest challenge for scholars was to describe, define, and analyze the foreign policy behavior of regional/ emerging/ and rising powers, like Turkey. Attempts to understand the behavior of these newly emerging centers of gravity in international relations through the lens of Cold War theories resulted in incomplete and inaccurate explanations.

In addition to the changes in the international system, significant regional transformations have also taken place throughout the Middle East. Even before the AK Party gained power, the death of Hafiz Assad and King Hussein paved the way for the emergence of a young leadership in the Middle East, and in many instances, a recalibration and revision of foreign and national security policies of the region's countries. After the electoral victory of the AK Party in November 2002, significant changes took place in the Middle East. The invasion of Iraq triggered “fault lines” in all ethnic and religious seismic zones in the region, leading to a decade-long ongoing civil war in the country, and resulting in the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish entity in the North. Meanwhile, the Middle East witnessed the electoral victory of Hamas in Palestine and the failure once again of the peace process. During the AK Party decade, Turkey emerged as an influential actor in the politics and economy of the Middle East. Trade agreements with neighboring countries, increasing economic and social exchanges with the Gulf countries and diplomatic interventions by the Turkish state regarding the conflicts in the region turned Turkey into a major international player. In the last years of the AK Party decade, the people's

movements in the authoritarian states of the region generated a new dynamic that still impacts the regional political equation. The Arab Spring and its aftermath, especially the repercussions in North Africa, the conflict in Syria, and the counterrevolution in Egypt, deeply influenced Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey's previous regional isolationism and non-intervention policies in the conflicts of the Middle East ended during this period. In this context, Turkey launched different initiatives in the region by using new foreign policy tools, such as soft power, public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and developmental assistance.

Global and regional changes were not the only developments during this decade. Important changes took place in Turkish domestic politics as well. Following decade-long political instability as a result of coalition governments in the 1990s, the AK Party won a landslide electoral victory in November 2002, producing a one-party government. The AK Party launched an assertive reform policy in order to start accession negotiations with the EU that included active civilian control of the military. Foreign policy makers introduced a multidimensional strategy to improve relations with multiple regions and countries at the same time. The combination of democratization in Turkey and its pro-active foreign policy with the revolution of information technology created an attentive and assertive public opinion on foreign policy issues. In turn, this new public opinion has the ability to influence and increase public opinion pressure on decision makers. Furthermore, as the influence of public opinion on Turkish foreign policy increased, various non-governmental organizations and private sector actors have become more involved in the process of foreign policy making. Acting both in coordination and autonomously, NGOs and different business organizations in Turkey launched initiatives in different countries. As the interest of the public grew, the news media boosted its coverage of international developments. Debate shows on foreign policy issues started broadcasting in prime time and foreign policy journalism evolved into a significant dimension of Turkish media.

Finally, foreign policy decision-making mechanisms have undergone significant changes in Turkey. Although the decision-making mechanism remains one of the most unexplored fields of foreign policy studies in Turkey, the increasing leverage of civilian and elected officials in foreign policy making has become more apparent. During the AK Party decade, hegemonic military and civilian bureaucracies in foreign policy and national security policy have gradually shifted to civilian and elected actors. While the reforms in Turkey helped achieve active civilian control of the military, civilian leadership emerged as the predominant decision makers in foreign policy and, consequently, the most important actor in Turkish foreign policy. Civilian political leaders played the most determinative role in foreign policy orientation and international public opinion started to pay attention to the actions and policies of civilian leaders instead of focusing on the statements of the Turkish military.

Taking these changes into account while trying to understand the transformation of Turkish foreign policy has become a difficult endeavor for foreign policy analysts. Simultaneous independent and sometimes interrelated changes across multiple levels have made it especially difficult to control some of the variables while studying these transformations. The ‘new’ approaches that claimed to have taken these multi-level changes into consideration were either a modification of old paradigms or unable to reach theoretical maturity. In addition, scholars did not always consider the dynamic nature and interactions of these changes in their analyses. Furthermore, the evolution of foreign policy in the last ten years was not fully understood and AK Party foreign policy was presented as linear without revision or modification.

This situation was most apparent when Turkish-American relations were redefined. Studies on the continuously fluctuating Turkish-American relationship have failed to formulate a defining model and, with few exceptions, have not gone beyond simply tracking the ups and downs of bilateral affairs. This has resulted in chronological explanations rather than theoretical innovations to analyze foreign policy changes. Labels created by policymakers to explain relations, such as *model partnership*, *enduring partnership*, *strategic partnership* and *partnership for democracy*, were adopted by scholars in many instances. This has resulted in a policy driven foreign policy research with no theoretical value.

## Transformation in the International System

The AK Party’s ten years in power has coincided with a global transformation of the international system. The newly emerging system has caused much heated debate on how it should be defined. During the unipolar juncture of international relations, scholars often discussed how international relations would develop, how inter-governmental relations would be handled, and how alliances would be formed. The United States’ triumph during the Cold War helped it emerge as the sole superpower. Through its military and political power, the US proved itself to be the first real global power in human history<sup>1</sup> that can project its influence in any field –including the economy, politics, military and culture. For some, this was the beginning of an era that could continue for decades.<sup>2</sup> Many experts believed that the US was a power impossible to counter, or one friendly and benign enough that it would not require a counter-balancing actor. The concept of “benign power” was the most frequently used concept to define American power.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1990s, academics who tried explaining the relationship between the US and other regional powers outside of Cold War codes introduced new terms, such as soft balancing,<sup>4</sup> balking,<sup>5</sup> blackmailing,<sup>6</sup> and hedging.<sup>7</sup> Realist

international relations scholars, particularly in the absence of any attempt to conventionally balance American power, argued that other powers in the international system would come up with alternative ways to control the US' power through different and unconventional means that would provide an opportunity for other countries to resist some of the demands of the US.<sup>8</sup> These strategies did not intend to counter US military force directly but, as in the case of soft balancing, attempted to resist the US in international institutions. As stated by Walt,

“Soft balancing does not seek or expect to alter the overall distribution of capabilities. Instead a strategy of soft balancing accepts the current balance of power but seeks to obtain better outcomes within it. In the current era of US dominance, therefore, soft balancing is the conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to US preferences- outcomes that could not be gained if the balancers did not give each other some degree of mutual support.”<sup>9</sup>

In this international system, Turkey's role and position in relation to the major powers of the international system was not clear. Some still described Turkey as a strategic country for the US and as an axis state.<sup>10</sup> Turkish government in these years was concerned about an emerging identity crisis in foreign relations. Although foreign policy makers emphasized its continuous strategic relevance for both Western countries and the global order, it was feeling isolated from the Western bloc as a result of both exclusion from the EU membership process and increasing criticism for its human rights and democracy record, as well as the lack of support for its fight against the PKK. Moreover, its relations with Israel and the lack of transparency and increasing skepticisms regarding the nature of this partnership did not allow Turkey to end its isolation from the Middle East. In fact, while the international system in 1990s transformed into a unipolar one, Turkish perception of foreign relations did not change much. The constant instability of the political order in Turkey and short-lived coalition governments resulted in a failure to adapt to the changing circumstances in international relations.

However, unipolarity of the international system did not last long. Contrary to forecasts about the endurance of unipolarity, the system was challenged in the mid-2000s. In 2003, theorists such as Charles Kupchan<sup>11</sup> and Immanuel Wallerstein<sup>12</sup> were already hinting at the end of US domination and the prospects of a new international system. After the Iraqi War, these arguments strengthened, as the protracted war caused yet another “Vietnam Syndrome” in



**Turkey launched different initiatives in its foreign policy by using new tools, such as soft power, public diplomacy and developmental assistance**

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
and German Chancellor Angela Merkel  
held a press conference in Berlin.

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the US. While the US was dealing with the spiraling civil war in Iraq, the world started challenging the legitimacy of America's actions and its decision to invade, in line with international and domestic criticism. The "benign superpower" argument of the 1990s was quickly replaced by a US power that increasingly used its military power and started to be more exclusionary, unilateral, and interventionist in its foreign policy and national security discourse. The terms that US foreign policy makers frequently used in mid-2000s, such as "either with us or not, axis of evil, coalition of willing," were considered the major factors behind the eradication of the positive image of the US. In his 2008 book, *Limits of American Power*, Andrew Bacevich claimed that due to its policies before and during the Iraq War, American leadership had come to an end and proclaimed the conclusion of the American century.<sup>13</sup>

Turkish foreign policy gave the first signs of change during this period in its relations with the United States. First of all, as a result of the Parliament's rejection to allow US troops to use Turkish soil to invade Iraq, Turkish-American relations went through an unprecedented crisis. After the invasion of Iraq and increasing pace of the civil war, the Turkish government became very critical of the US' actions in Iraq, which was again unprecedented in the history of their relations. The photos from the Abu Gharib prison, the increasing number of casualties in Iraq, and the reaction of the members and leaders of the AK Party to these developments strained bilateral relations. Furthermore, Turkey did not stop its rapprochement with countries like Syria and Iran during this period, despite protests and pressure from some circles in Washington, DC, and did not jump on the bandwagon of some US' policies in the region. Turkey's increasingly autonomous foreign policy actions demonstrated the changes in the nature of bilateral relations. This meant both the loss of credibility and international legitimacy of unconditional US supremacy in international relations and the rise of Turkey in the Middle East as an independent actor. Although some in Turkish foreign policy scholarship draw a correlation between the crisis in bilateral relations during the Cyprus Crisis and Iraqi Crisis, there was a more sustained and long-term goal in Turkish foreign policy to revise its policies in the Middle East as well as to modify the nature of its relations with the United States after the Iraq War. In this sense, there was a change in both



## Turkey's role and position in relation to the major powers of the international system was not clear during the Cold War period

the perception of the Middle East and the assessment of bilateral relations with the US. Thus, Turkey's role in the emerging regional and international order had to be reconsidered.

The global economic crisis, which reached its peak in 2008 with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, was an important turning point for the existing international system. American experts who had been cautiously watching the economic rise of China since the 1990s started publishing works that signaled the end of the unilateral world system.<sup>14</sup> This new paradigm caused a major debate regarding the global system. Even though the majority of discussions focus on the post-unilateral world system, there is still a group that defines itself as "antideclinst" and believes in the certainty of US domination, disagreeing that the capacity of emerging powers could counter the US. Most emerging powers, they hold, are unable either to solve their own domestic issues or project their power onto the international platform.<sup>15</sup> However, among those who argue that there was a US recession, the discussion focuses on which form a new world system will take.

On the one hand, there are scholars and observers of the international system who believe that the emerging system looks like a bipolar one with the global leadership of the United States and China.<sup>16</sup> While on the other hand, a group of analyst hold to the approach outlined by the Goldman Sachs's projections that predict a more multipolar world system. During this period, Turkey's name has emerged in different political and economic projections as an important rising power in the international system. Although the majority of the discussion on rising powers focus on the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as a potential center of gravity of global economy and politics,<sup>17</sup> some leading experts in the field also started to express a new role conceptualization for Turkey. Many leading experts reiterated Turkey's new role as a regional power as well as an emerging economy. Among these, Jack Goldstone predicted the TIMBI (Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, India) would be the next set of gravity centers in the new international system,<sup>18</sup> whereas economist Jim O'Neill coined the term MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey) and argued that MINT rather than the BRICS will be emerging economic giants in the next decade.<sup>19</sup> In another study, CNAS and the German Marshall Fund considered countries, including Turkey, Brazil, India, and Indonesia, as the potential prospective building blocks of the emergence and

functioning of a new international system.<sup>20</sup> Later, after considering its economic potential, political effects, and demographic structure, Goldman Sachs, who originally brought the idea of the BRICS, placed Turkey among the list of 11 countries, which it named “next eleven,” that would be influential actors of the international system in the next era.<sup>21</sup>

This was the first time that Turkey was placed in such a significant position of global politics, which necessitated a new conceptualization of the relationship between Turkey and the US, as well as Turkey’s relations with other emerging powers and regional actors in the Middle East. Confronted with the changes in the international system, the unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar systems that

## Turkish foreign policy gave the first signs of change in the early 2000s in its relations with the United States

constitute the traditional models of the realist theory have insufficient explanatory powers. Among international relations experts, there were those who claimed that, following the unipolar US era, the new system would be nonpolar,<sup>22</sup> which would necessitate a new form of theorization of relationship patterns in international relations. Furthermore, the speedy evolution of the international system and shortfalls in predictability increasingly added to the complexity of the matter. More recently, theories that claimed the new world order would emerge differently than the previous one started to gain more popularity. For instance, the uni-multi-polar world order proposed by Huntington in the 1990s<sup>23</sup> started to attract the attention of many observers, including Fareed Zakaria<sup>24</sup> because of its explanatory power. However, none of the existing theoretical revisions or conceptualization provided a dynamic approach to explain potential relationship patterns between emerging powers and the US, as well as emerging powers relations among themselves. In a broader sense, this was a problem regarding the foreign policy studies of all major emerging and regional powers in the age of US decline.

During this period, although there were not enough theoretical formulations of Turkey’s foreign policy as a regional power, a new debate emerged regarding global and regional politics and Turkey’s evolving international role. In this debate several assumptions were considered as possible norms of a new partnership with the US. In this debate, scholars emphasized the increasing uncertainty in the nature of relations. Meanwhile, different variables, such as the possible role of secondary regional powers in bilateral relations between Turkey and the US, have developed that may impact the analysis of Turkish foreign policy. The strategic and geopolitical revisions that the US implemented after the Iraqi War, particularly those under the Obama administration, further complicated this situation. While Obama pushed other world powers to take on global economic and political responsibility with the “responsibility

doctrine,”<sup>25</sup> he shifted the focal point of US foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region and redistributed the US’s military power with the implementation of new defense doctrines.<sup>26</sup> To avoid losing more time, the new strategy urged all regional stakeholders, particularly in the Middle East, to significantly rethink their foreign policy. This period overlapped with regional powers increasingly asserting their autonomy in foreign policy, thus becoming less dependent on the US in terms of both economics and politics.

Turkey’s relations with the US in this period evolved from a solid Cold War alliance to a more a la carte partnership. Even though some experts argued that the US-Turkey disputes in the Middle East are only “balking”<sup>27</sup> or “soft-balancing,”<sup>28</sup> the gradual change in relative power and diverging national interests between the countries have made it difficult for Cold War scholarship or unipolar world notions to fully explain their relations. The relative power play between Turkey and the US, Turkey’s emergence as a regional political power, and Turkey’s increased economic independence have prevented the establishment of a consistent balance in bilateral relations and boosted Turkey’s confidence. Theories that have attempted to define US-Turkish relations during this period have suffered from inconsistency and insufficiency. For example, the “model partnership” suggested by Obama during his trip to Turkey in 2009 was often used to describe the relationship, until Turkey voted against imposing additional sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council, changing the description from “model partnership” to soft-balancing. In the wake of the Arab Spring, the relationship had strengthened. However, with regard to Syria, the slight turbulence in trust relationships, as a result of divergence of opinions on how to resolve the conflict, has rendered all these notions obsolete once again.

In this context, uncertainty in the global sphere has made it harder to interpret the effects of the international system on Turkish foreign policy and evaluate relations between Turkey and the US. Moreover, international relations literature – particularly studies on the nature and emergence of regional powers, their relations with global powers and other regional powers, and how this reflects on the international system – has proven insufficient and emerged as yet another challenge in studying this field. In the future, there will be a need to search for more dynamic and less static theories and approaches in regions that are open to transformation, particularly the Middle East. This lacuna demonstrates that the uncertainty and discussions surrounding the effects of the system on foreign policy will persist. In the suggested models, one of the most important points to keep in mind is that the current situation may not be transitional, but persist long-term. This serves to show that new and creative methods are needed to revise the literature and language used to define and model the AK Party’s foreign policy, as well as Turkey’s relationship with the US.

## Transformations in Domestic Politics

In addition to shifts in global and regional politics, Turkish domestic politics – the second level of foreign policy analysis – has gone through a significant transformation within the last ten years. The occurrence of this transformation – sometimes independent of developments in the systemic level and sometimes in relation to external and regional developments, such as the Arab Spring and the European integration process – has made it much harder to analyze Turkey's foreign policy. The difficulty in controlling external and domestic variables has made it impossible to examine and describe Turkish foreign policy by generic methods and traditional models. The developments and changes, occurring at multiple levels, have caused much of the perplexities and misinterpretations in academia as well as in policy circles in Washington when trying to understand the various maneuvers of Turkish foreign policy.

Other than the emergence of the AK Party government as a single party government after its electoral victory, Turkish politics witnessed some major developments. On the domestic front, the AK Party government expedited the European integration process by passing significant reform packages. These reform packages not only paved the way for active civilian control of the military and the eradication of elements that limited some basic freedoms and liberties in the constitution, but also launched a new motivation among foreign policy makers to reboot Turkey's relations with the European Union. One of the significant sources of Turkish foreign policy's isolation in the 1990s took place as a result of the EU's Luxembourg Summit, which excluded Turkey from the Eastern and Central European countries that were willing to become members of the EU. This exclusion resulted in increasing Euroskepticism among the Turkish public and discouraged any attempt to conduct relations with the European Union. Even, Turkish foreign policy became dissuaded from pursuing bilateral relations with the member countries of the EU in late 1990s. However, the Helsinki Summit and reform process, which helped Turkey to launch accession negotiations, increased willingness as well as motivation to pursue multidimensional relations with both the EU and its member states. Furthermore, the continuation of rapprochement with neighboring countries, such as Syria, and opening towards the Middle East further increased the self-confidence of Turkey's foreign policy establishment..

In the last ten years, public awareness and interest in foreign affairs also increased, making Turkish public opinion an important factor in shaping foreign policies. As mentioned above this was seen in 2003 when the Turkish Parliament, under pressure by Turkish public opinion, voted against allowing the US to launch its troops into Iraq from Turkish soil. Strengthened public interest in foreign policy and an increased demand for news and information



A demonstration in support of Egypt's ousted Muslim Brotherhood led government and Syrian opposition was held in İstanbul.

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created a new generation of civilian foreign policy experts. In academia especially, this demand resulted in more policy-oriented research in international relations departments, while there was more emphasis on foreign affairs coverage in journalism. In addition, the transformation of civil-military relations gave civilian officials responsibility with regard to foreign policy and national security issues, which normalized the excessive threat perception and security-centered approach of foreign policymaking. These transformations indicate that those who try to interpret Turkish foreign relations from the outside will have to factor in the public's role and opinion as new actors in Turkish foreign policymaking, as leaders became more accountable for decisions in foreign and national security policy.

These dramatic changes in domestic politics resulted in the emergence of different dynamic variables that needs to be taken into account in order to understand Turkish foreign policy shifts. During the AK Party decade, most of these changes took place continuously and as a result of evolving domestic politics. During these years, it became misleading to take a snapshot of a particular period and present it through overgeneralization. In fact, the impact of these domestic variables over foreign policy presented a wide-ranging diversity.

In addition to difficulties with analyzing the nature of the interaction between domestic politics and foreign policy, the multidirectional transformation and development in Turkey over the past ten years has brought major challenges to the analysis of foreign policy. For example, even within a single variable, such

as the effects of public opinion on Turkish foreign policy, we see the shifts at its multiple levels. Even though the public expressed certain views and participated in foreign policy under previous administrations, the last ten years have been revolutionary in terms of extending this involvement to a wider range of Turkish citizens.

In order to understand the real impact of this change in the public opinion/foreign policy nexus, one needs to analyze the different dimensions of public opinion. Foreign policy theorists such as Rosenau demonstrate that the notion of public opinion can be categorized in various ways. At the top of Rosenau's pyramid is the elite, including actors from the public administration and media, followed by an involved and active group comprised of businessmen and intellectuals, with the general public at the bottom.<sup>29</sup> The changes that have taken place simultaneously across all of these levels in the last ten years make the Turkish case particularly important. On all levels of this pyramid, the attention, the interest, and the weight of public opinion have changed dramatically over the last ten years.

During the AK Party years, although the top of the pyramid – the elite – continued to be actively involved in foreign policy, there have been significant shifts in the social structure and composition of the members of the foreign policy elite. The civilian elected officials have replaced the military elite and foreign policy bureaucracy, who had been the dominant actors in foreign policy decision-making. Issues of foreign policy became subject to parliamentary and political debates among political parties. The AK Party, in particular, established a separate unit in its structure to deal with foreign policy related issues at a party level. More recently, opposition parties, such as Republican People's Party, also started to pay increasing attention to foreign policy related matters. Foreign policy experts and parliamentarians with foreign policy experience increasingly become more visible in the public space and assume 'actorship'. Furthermore, the narrow array of media actors involved and informed in foreign policy has expanded to include a much larger group of press corps. Changes in the media sector have resulted in an increase in TV programs and news articles covering foreign policy issues, thus expanding the flow of information to the public. Public demand for information on foreign affairs has further intensified this process.

In the last ten years the second layer (comprised of businessmen and intellectuals) has also become increasingly involved in foreign policy. Groups of businessmen, who used to join heads of state in their travels and were a significant part of the presidential entourage, have been replaced with independent and active entrepreneurs, who are able to advise and guide policymakers in foreign affairs. Of course, the transition of Turkish foreign policy from a security-oriented approach to a "trading state" approach has played an important role in

this transformation. The emergence of a foreign policy vision that emphasizes regional economic integration and international trade has empowered business circles and thus played an important role in facilitating international economic relations. The Turkish state has started to build relations, not only to provide safety and security, but also to increase economic integration in the region, which has created numerous opportunities for Turkish businessmen.

This changing foreign policy approach has led to an increase in research and activities among intellectuals and academics, as well as an increased tolerance for alternative paradigms and ideas from the state establishment. These academics and researchers focus on foreign policy-related issues and practical foreign policy studies in the circles and centers they have established. This policy-oriented research has also become more institutionalized with the respective increase in think tanks and institutes to study foreign policy. In the second layer, there have also been significant transformations in terms of interest and coverage. In Turkish foreign policy and international relations, the issues and regions that were previously ignored have begun to garner more attention. The intensive focus on Central Asia and the Caucasus during the post-Cold War era, as well as EU-Turkey relations during the membership process, have been supplemented by new geographies and soft-power aspirations in regions like Africa and Latin America.

The transformations in the first and second layers of the public opinion pyramid have also had significant impacts on the changes in the foreign policy views of the third layer, the general public. Instead of reacting to foreign policy crises through historical reflexes, public opinion has begun adopting long-term positions in foreign policy strategies and, at the same time, developed the capacity to defend their stances. The increased visibility of foreign policy issues in the media has been a response to an increased public demand for information on these issues. In addition, NGOs' increasing influence in various geographical areas has introduced the public to current global issues and foreign affairs matters. In particular, public interest in the area of humanitarian aid has developed to the extent that the public could consciously react to issues like poverty in Somalia, massacres in Rakhine, ethnic conflict in East Turkistan, and the ongoing crisis in Palestine. As these



**In the last ten years, public awareness and interest in foreign affairs also increased, making Turkish public opinion an important factor in shaping foreign policies**

## The transition of Turkish foreign policy from a security-oriented approach to a “trading state” approach took place facilitating international economic relations

approach and demonstrated that public opinion had the ability to shape the administration's foreign policy. Recently, the spread of social media use and intensive foreign policy discussions on issues like Syria have demonstrated the public's agility in taking positions, and its rationality and consciousness of how to be heard in a changing Turkey. However, the increasing impact of public opinion also makes it challenging for actors to follow and interpret Turkish foreign policy.

In this context, another transformation that took place on the domestic front has been the perception about Turkey's pro-active role on the international platform. Foreign policy makers and popular opinion have both supported a shift away from passive and defensive policies in favor of adopting proactive strategies. One of the most apparent signs of this was the shifting focus of foreign affairs, from being limited to conflicts with neighboring countries to the zero-problem strategy. Policy makers and the public both want Turkey not to merely be one of the players, but to be a game changer; not to be an actor that adopts norms, but one that makes them. One of the primary causes of this view was the boost in confidence after recovering from the 2001 economic crisis, the political instability of the 1990s, and the high inflation rates of the 1980s. Economic success ultimately established Turkey among the top 20 countries in the world in terms of GDP. In addition, entrepreneurs and newly founded think tanks gave direction and vision to foreign policy, business circles expanded across various geographical areas, which improved trade relationships, and NGOs started conducting aid activities around the world. These developments resulted in a new understanding of foreign policy on domestic and global fronts, constructive solutions for problems, and heightened visibility and prestige on the international platform. The amount of interest and support at every level of society has shown that public opinion works to revise Turkey's international role.

Debates on the role of Turkey in the global theater surfaced when the terms “regional powers” and “emerging powers” were added to international relations literature and revealed a new dimension on the international platform. In these discussions, while Turkey was being perceived as an important international actor, it was also taking on a role that international public opinion

would allow. For example, Brzezinski, who previously called Turkey an important global geostrategic actor, reiterated his views and further argued that Turkey should be integrated into the Western world, showing the significance of the role that Turkey could play in the future global system.<sup>30</sup> As a result, transformations in the public domain and perceptions of the domestic public have significantly transformed the interaction between domestic politics and foreign policy. Compared to the 1990s, a more multi-dimensional and multi-actor structure has quickly emerged, and the Turkish public has taken on a more influential role that is responsive to and involved in foreign affairs.

### **Transformations in the Decision-making Mechanisms**

The ten-year period under the AK Party administration was also significant due to the challenges in the third layer of foreign policy analysis: transformations in decision-making mechanisms in foreign affairs. The study of decision-making mechanisms in foreign policy is one of the most important subfields of foreign policy analysis. When nations with various government structures, cultures, and actors are taken into consideration, one can identify distinct forms of decision-making mechanisms. Scholars of foreign policy decision-making classify these forms under three different categories. In the “predominant leader model,” foreign policy decisions are made under the initiative of a single leader who appropriates the resources of the nation toward a particular foreign policy goal. In the second group, the “single group model,” foreign policy decisions are made by a group of individuals who consult one another to reach a final course of action. The number of people within a single group can be as few as two or as many as hundreds. In the final “coalition model,” foreign policy decisions are made by coalitions of multiple groups, organizations, or persons. Contrary to the group model, actors in coalitions represent different organizations and are independent, without the dominance of one organization over another.<sup>31</sup>

As mentioned in the previous section, decision-making mechanisms in Turkish foreign policy have moved beyond traditional norms with the transformation of civil-military relations over the last ten years. In classical Turkish foreign policymaking, decision mechanisms were comprised of a group of appointed officials, which included high ranking military generals and foreign policy bureaucrats. Civilian politicians and elected leaders did not have a say in Turkish foreign policy or important national security matters. Military actors, especially, considered national security matters to be too significant to leave to civilian officials. As such, military actors dominated critical national security matters and directed the orientation of Turkish foreign policy. In the Cold War years, due to the priority of security related issues in Turkey’s relations with the Western world, the military emerged as a major actor. For the

civilian elected officials, the guidance of the military in these matters became almost inevitable. This condition was institutionalized after the 1980 coup and subsequent establishment of the National Security Council (NSC), where the clear outnumbering of military actors over civilian actors in the Council solidified the extent of the military's power. Over time, the evaluation of all foreign policy strategies and threat assessments by the NSC in a non-transparent fashion transformed civilian actors, including foreign affairs ministers, into civil servants who had to accept and implement policy decisions.

The security challenges facing Turkey in the 1990s – including the rise of the PKK, the crisis with Greece over Cyprus and other islands in the Aegean Sea, and the territorial waters dispute – saw the domination of security issues over the foreign policy agenda, which led the military to further consolidate its power in matters of foreign policy. During these years, political instability in Turkey and turbulence in the coalition administration prevented powerful civilian political leaders from emerging. For instance, the military and security cooperation agreements between Turkey and Israel was initiated and signed by the military leaders and in most circumstances bypassed parliamentary oversight. These circumstances further strengthened the military's presence in Turkish politics and policymaking. For many years, the military remained the most powerful and trusted institution of the Turkish state. The coalition between the military and foreign policy bureaucracy dwarfed every other elected civilian leader, and a security-oriented foreign policy dominated the foreign policy roadmap of the Turkish government.

After the AK Party's victory in the November 2002 elections, a new paradigm started to emerge. The elections put a stop to predictions and projections that the military tutelage would continue indefinitely. As with any other post-coup election, the public elected the party farthest from the military as a reaction to the army's previous intervention in politics. At the same time, the European Union membership process sped up and the EU Commission wanted reforms in the NSC, which resulted in a reduction in the number of military actors present. These were all new developments for Turkey. After the AK Party's victory, the head of the party, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had an active political suspension and became an international figure, receiving invitations from all over the world as a 'chief diplomat,' despite not having an official public role. This became much clearer during US-Turkish negotiations regarding the issue of the invasion of Iraq. After only two months in office, the civilian administration was significantly visible in the negotiation process by the inclusion of not only ministers, but also the advisors of the Prime Minister. When General Özkök was asked about relations with the administration, he stated that they were working in great harmony. Furthermore, in its meeting prior to the March 1<sup>st</sup> voting at the Turkish Parliament, the NSC decided that the Parliament should make the ultimate decision on how to proceed. This decision was

unexpected among some leaders in the US, such as Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who, in an interview with Mehmet Ali Birand, accused the Turkish military of an inability to demonstrate effective leadership. During this time, decision-making mechanisms were gradually transforming into the coalition model, where civilians, alongside the military, were making foreign policy decisions. Even though the military's engagement with national security matters has continued, the AK Party administration and Tayyip Erdoğan's international recognition have made civilian leaders important actors in Turkish foreign policy.

**Instead of reacting to foreign policy crises through historical reflexes, public opinion has begun adopting long-term positions in foreign policy strategies**

While relations with the US were turbulent during the first years of the AK Party government, Turkey began taking important steps towards EU membership. Even though the input of the military was taken into consideration, the process was primarily handled by elected civilian leaders within the coalition unit. In the years to follow, the “zero problem policy” with neighbors strengthened the “civilian effect” on foreign policy. Military actors and the foreign policy bureaucracy in Turkey, which had previously established good relations with the US and Israel, lagged behind civilian leaders in terms of developing policies with other nations in the Middle East. In Syria and Jordan in particular, the development of personal diplomacy within the leadership had increased the influence of the Prime Minister and his close advisors in foreign policy during this time frame.

In 2007, the military's influence on politics resurfaced with the Internet Memorandum, but the foreign policy dimension of the February 28<sup>th</sup> post-modern coup was absent. In the February 28<sup>th</sup> coup, tensions between military and civilian leaders increased due to disagreements over Turkish foreign policy. In particular, the trajectory of Israeli-Turkish relations created a major rift that became one of the catalysts of the military's intervention in politics. Prime Minister Erbakan's foreign travels and foreign affairs vision was often criticized as a divergence from the foreign policy track, whereas the April 2007 Memorandum focused primarily on domestic politics.

Also in 2007, voters again elected the AK Party, which the military had targeted in its political intervention. Following the electoral victory, decision-making mechanisms in foreign policy gradually shifted from the coalition model to the single group model once again. However, Prime Minister Erdoğan and his circle of advisors began to gain the upper hand in the design and implementation of foreign policy. During this period, the civilian administration became more autonomous in foreign policy decision mechanisms, while the

legitimacy of the military deteriorated, especially after the Ergenekon trials. With the decreasing involvement of the military, Turkish foreign policy entered a “normalization” phase.

In later years, with Prime Minister Erdoğan’s strengthened charismatic authority and increased personal diplomatic relations, foreign policy decision-making mechanisms shifted to somewhere between the single group model and the predominant leader model. Erdoğan became the most popular leader in the Middle East and began taking an active role in mediating political conflicts in the region. Erdoğan’s peace talks with Assad and Olmert, prior to Israel’s Gaza Operation, was a result of his high level diplomatic visibility. Foreign policy decision-making mechanisms evolved into a model where foreign policy was developed by a group of advisors and the Prime Minister made the final decisions.

## Policy makers and the public both want Turkey not to merely be one of the players, but to be a game changer

In the last decade under the AK Party administration, the domestic front of foreign policymaking mechanisms has experienced significant transformations. The military and foreign policy bureaucracy have lost their advantage, and decision-making mechanisms have shifted from a coalition to a group model. More recently, the system has moved between the group model and the predominant leader model. Together with systematic transformation and changes in domestic politics, the shifts in decision-making mechanisms have also created challenges to those who attempt to explain the AK Party’s foreign policy during this period.

## Conclusions

The transformations in the three layers of foreign policy analysis that have taken place in Turkey’s recent history have introduced challenges to analyzing and understanding Turkish foreign policy. The transformation itself has been a gradual process, resulting in the need for alternative paradigms. Adapting these new paradigms to the international system stands as yet another challenge. Although different perspectives have emerged to explain domestic and foreign policy relationships and interactions of various foreign policy actors, the current models are insufficient and will need to be revised and refined to explain the foreign policies of emerging powers.

The neoclassical realist theory that has been implemented in many cases is considered the most promising among the proposed revisionist theories thus far. The neoclassical realist approach – in which constraining factors of the international system together with domestic politics determine a nation’s for-

eign policy – can be considered an improvement from theories that neglect a nation's political and economic structure in foreign policy. However, the lack of studies that utilize this theory inhibits the progress and accumulation of knowledge in the field. Additionally, uncertainties within the international system have challenged the implementation of neoclassic realism. In the future, the application of such theories may improve and expand, further contributing to study of foreign policy in Turkey.

In addition to neoclassical realism, one of the most underdeveloped branches of foreign policy study is “foreign policy change” literature. Until now, models that aimed to explain the transformation in foreign policy faced several limitations. As with the field of neoclassical realism, most of these theories were not tested and a cumulative discipline never emerged. However, further examination of foreign policy literature may pave the way for a more comprehensive study of foreign policy change in Turkey. Finally, a periodical categorization of Turkish foreign policy may be necessary in order to understand the impact of different variables. For the last ten years, the AK Party did not always follow the same foreign policy. It has evolved throughout the years. To divide foreign policy into these categorical periods may be helpful to examine the transformation. In this context, foreign policy change, neoclassical realist theories and the categorization of the AK Party's foreign policy need to be studied attentively. Furthermore, considering the dynamics and uncertainties of emerging states and their respective policies, a dynamic theory approach needs to be developed and applied to various cases, which may help better understand and explain Turkish foreign policy. ■

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