

# Turkey's Darfur Policy: Convergences and Differentiations from the Muslim World

MEHMET ÖZKAN\* and BİROL AKGÜN\*\*

## ABSTRACT

*The effectiveness of the Muslim world in finding a solution to the Darfur conflict is open to debate. While many Muslim countries denied the existence of a genocidal conflict, arguing that the reports were a Western plot, some tried to go beyond the dichotomy of the West's insistence on genocide and its outright rejection by the Muslim world. This article discusses Turkey's Darfur policy in terms of 'the war on terror' discourse and Turkey's developing multidimensional foreign policy and the restrictions arising from such a policy. It argues that Turkey's approach has had the characteristics of both a convergence with and differentiation from that of the Muslim world. Turkey intended to go beyond current debates by creating a new 'language' on Darfur but failed due to its ineffective media policy and the limitations of its multidimensional foreign policy. Nevertheless, Turkey's involvement may be seen as an example of passive quiet diplomacy in a highly complex international environment.*

When the Bosnian and Kosovo wars erupted in the 1990s, the Muslim world reacted in several ways to show its disapproval of the atrocities and asked the international community to urgently act. Street protests, aid campaigns and media reports about the killings in Bosnia and Kosovo along with diplomatic initiatives of Islamic international organizations (e.g. the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the OIC) and Muslim states were a feature in the Muslim world.

Since 2003, there has been a conflict going on in Darfur. Although a fragile peace agreement was signed and elections took place in 2010, the situation on the ground is still far from a lasting peace. The death toll in Darfur conflict since its outset is subject to huge speculation, but the range is usually stated as anywhere from 200,000 to 400,000. One should also note that most of these killings in Darfur occurred due to starvation and disease, an

\* Sevilla University, Spain, metkan82@hotmail.com

\*\* Selcuk University, bakgun@selcuk.edu.tr

Turkey explicitly avoided the genocide debates, be it on Darfur or Armenia, at the discursive level and this has shaped Turkey's approach to the Darfur conflict

made any breakthrough comments or suggestions, except for some diplomatic language emphasizing the need to find a solution. Why is this so? Why is Muslim reaction so low key? What are the main determinants that define the Muslim world's reaction to Darfur? The conflict in Darfur is considered an intra-Muslim conflict, and thus Muslims are expected to act before others. It is exactly for this reason that some went further to call Darfur as the "Muslim world's shame".<sup>2</sup> The question here is whether the Darfur policy of the Muslim world is driven more by political and economic considerations than by consideration of the brethren or the *umma*.

This article does not intend to provide an answer to such a profound question; rather, it tries to portray the underlying elements of the Muslim world's reaction toward Darfur by critically evaluating Turkey's involvement in the conflict. Turkey has been chosen because it has been cited as a rising star of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Muslim world, not only for its growing economic potential and deepening democratic credentials, but also because of its recent pro-active diplomatic initiatives in conflict areas such as the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus. Turkey is not an Arab country and is therefore not a party to the conflict in Darfur from an ethnic point of view, nor is it a country that shows indifference in the conflict. However, Turkey, as a rising power in the international arena, is aware of its diplomatic limits and has to balance the concerns of the Muslim world with the interests of other actors at international and regional levels. As Turkey strengthens its relations with Western institutions like NATO and the EU and serves as an elected member of the UN Security Council for 2009-2010, it can neither ignore the genocide claims<sup>3</sup> nor the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) about Sudanese President Omer al Basher. Apparently, Turkey does not want to jeopardize its relations with the Arab and African countries by joining the Western understanding of the Darfur crisis, and thus takes a pragmatic stance toward the issue. This approach, however, draws serious criticism especially from liberal circles in and outside of the country. Therefore, Turkey seems to be between a rock and a hard place with its Darfur policy.

A critical appraisal of Turkey's approach to this issue may not only help us understand Turkey's growing soft power in the Muslim world, but will also reveal the dilemmas, contradictions and limitations of its recently proclaimed proactive foreign policy. In the first part, an overview of the Muslim world's response is evaluated. In the second part, Turkey's Darfur policy is discussed and explained in relation to the quiet diplomacy literature. What follows then is concluding remarks and some implications of the study for Turkey and the Muslim world.

### **The Muslim World and Darfur: An Overview**

Although a thorough discussion of the historical roots and the political aspects of the Darfur conflict are beyond the scope of this paper, a very short background of the conflict is necessary. The conflict started in early 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) began attacking government targets, accusing Khartoum of oppressing black Africans in favor of Arabs. The government of Sudan responded with troops and by backing militias, known collectively as the *Janjaweed*. The *Janjaweed* and government forces have used indiscriminate force to attack villages and towns across Darfur. Some 2.7 million people have fled their homes since the conflict began. The triggers of this conflict are complex and interwoven. Factors include environmental degradation, previous famines, political neglect resulting in a lack of development, and outside interference. The African Union (AU) and the UN have remained central to the international response to Darfur. The AU made a significant appearance from the start and demonstrated a willingness to play an active role, despite limited military capacity and political constraints. Initially, the AU deployed a peace-keeping force in Sudan called the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) but the ability of the AMIS to protect civilians and humanitarian operations was difficult due to its limited capacity, thus leading to establishment of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in July 2007.<sup>4</sup> Today the Darfur conflict stands as an issue that divides international community after the ICC issued an arrest warrant for the Sudanese President Omer al Basher.<sup>5</sup>

The Darfur conflict has had four stages and it is imperative to outline those in order to locate the crisis in an international context. The first period, from the outset of the crisis in February 2003 to the end of 2004, was characterized as "the site of brutal counterinsurgency"<sup>6</sup> and the death toll in this period was estimated to be somewhere between 100,000 and 400,000.<sup>7</sup> In the second period, between early 2005 and the ICC's indictment of al Basher on July 14, 2008, there was a decrease in fighting in Darfur while international interest sparked genocide claims.<sup>8</sup> In the initial stages of the conflict, during which mass killings occurred, there

was little international interest in Darfur compared to the later stages, mostly because international attention was diverted by the Iraqi invasion. The third stage is the post-ICC process that has seen a relatively serious international involvement which was intensified with the Doha talks. Although an agreement was reached in 2010, it divided the international community. While the AU,<sup>9</sup> the Arab League (AL)<sup>10</sup> and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)<sup>11</sup> see the ICC decision as an obstacle to peace efforts, the UN and the EU see the warrant as an advancement in the process towards ending the mass killings. It is certain that with the decision of the ICC the international community has been divided as to how to further peace efforts despite the peace agreement among parties; however, there are signs that al Basher has softened his support to rebels and the conflict has almost come to an end since the ICC indictment.<sup>12</sup> From the elections of April 2010 onwards, the Darfur conflict has entered the fourth period. This is, and will be, highly critical for two reasons. If the peace agreement is implemented with the support of domestic actors and the international community, this period may create a breakthrough in reaching a lasting peace. However, if the international community does not follow up on the peace process, and if domestic actors consider it in their interests to continue the attacks, Darfur may return to the earlier periods of killings and brutality. Indeed, there are indications that this is the direction.<sup>13</sup>

This periodization is important in understanding the Muslim world's reaction to the conflict. During the first period, almost all international attention, both in the Muslim world and the West, was focused on the invasion of Iraq and a blind eye was turned to the developments in Darfur. In the second period, there was an increased interest in the conflict from the Western media through NGOs (for example, the Save the Darfur Coalition), but the reaction from the Muslim world was very low in substance and highly defensive against the Western discourse of genocide. What we saw in the third period is that Western attention has swayed away and the Muslim world, along with the AU, has played a critical role in reaching an agreement. The fourth period has a potential of possible indifference to the Darfur conflict by both the Muslim world and the West due to decreased media reporting and international interest after the peace agreement.

However, at the societal level in the Muslim world there has been a concern about the conflicts and killings in Darfur. For example, a poll conducted in April 2007 by the Arab American Institute and Zogby International in four Arab countries (Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) and in Malaysia and Turkey provides some illuminating insights regarding the perception of the Darfur issue by Islamic societies. More than three quarters of Muslim respondents in the six

countries surveyed thought that Arabs and Muslims should be equally concerned about the situation in Darfur as they are about the Arab-Israeli conflict, with results ranging from a high of 95% in Morocco to 76% in Turkey. Strong majorities in each of the six countries also supported the intervention of other Muslim nations in Darfur to stop the war. When asked if their country should do more to help in Darfur, overwhelming majorities responded favorably. Rates were particularly high in Morocco (94%), Saudi Arabia (91%) and Malaysia (91%).<sup>14</sup>

The question is *if* Muslims in the street care about Darfur, then why have the governments and international organizations been silent or ineffective channeling this support? Part of the answer may be found in the words of a representative of El Fasher Call, a local NGO in Darfur, in an AU consulting session in Darfur: "The AU is like the Arab League, it responds to governments, not public pressure."<sup>15</sup> This also indicates that the silent acquiescence of the OIC, the AL, and the heads of states is not a reflection of public attitudes, but of political and strategic calculations as well as other priorities.<sup>16</sup>

Although the Muslim street cares about the conflict, Islamic civil society organizations have been largely silent. Different from other crises in the Muslim world, such as in Bosnia, Kosovo and the Xingjian province of China, in which several Islamic NGOs raised awareness about the conflicts through aid campaigns and brought the issue to the public attention by organizing conferences, press meetings and publications, there has been little NGO interest since the beginning of the Darfur conflict. Several reasons account for this inactivity and ignorance in the Muslim world. First, Muslim NGOs focused too much attention and energy on the Iraqi War that as a result they ended up ignoring Darfur. Second, although there is a high public interest about Darfur, there exists a deep lack of knowledge in the Muslim world about the actual situation in Darfur. Today it is still difficult to find an authoritative voice to understand and formulate a policy about what is happening in Darfur. Unlike other conflicts, such as, for example, in Xingjian and in Bosnia, the Turkish public has no clear-cut understanding (true or false) about the real causes and consequences of the conflict in Sudan. Actually, the majority of the Turkish public and elite do not even understand the very tribal and even the religious debates behind the Darfur events.<sup>17</sup> What has been more confusing for the Muslim world is that the two conflicting sides are supposedly Muslims, Africans and Arabs. Simply put, why the two sides fight has had no simple explanation for many people, thus creating obscurity and confusion over the issue.

Despite this background, one should not overlook here that the AL and the Muslim world in general have, in some critical moments of the crises, in fact tried

Turkey did not accept the international understanding of the Darfur conflict as genocide nor has it shared the rejection of prevailing violence in the region

demned military attacks against civilians as “massive violations of human rights.” However the statement was removed from the official Arab League website after complaints from the Sudanese government.<sup>18</sup> On the ground, Arab countries have contributed 3,239 soldiers to the UN’s 20,000 peacekeeping troops in Darfur as of November 2009. Of those, 2,590 are from Egypt and the rest come from Jordan. While Western powers had been politically active in raising the genocide claims, they have sent comparatively few military personnel. Among the Western states Germany sent 13, France, Italy and Netherlands sent one each and the UK and the US sent none.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, since the start of the conflict there have been quiet diplomatic efforts to reach a peaceful settlement initiated either by the AU or Muslim states like Qatar. The latter hosted meetings on Darfur that was attended by representatives of the main rebel group the JEM and the Khartoum government in early 2009. They agreed to resume talks which led to reconciliation later. In April 2009, delegations from five local rebel groups arrived in Qatar to hold consultations with officials in Doha and the joint UN-AU mediator to reach a common ground and resume the stalled Darfur peace process.<sup>20</sup> Such efforts, aided and supported by the UN, the AU, the AL and the OIC, bore fruit in February 2010 and resulted in the signing a peace accord between the Sudanese government and local rebel groups.<sup>21</sup> On the basis of this agreement, elections were held in Sudan in April 2010. Among Muslim nations, Turkey’s diplomatic engagement with the Sudanese government drew more interest and criticism from the world than the engagement of the Muslim Arab states.

### **What Drives Turkey’s Approach to Darfur?**

Turkey’s approach to Darfur has been criticized as contradictory and having a double standard by analysts and human rights groups. Such criticism was heard especially loudly when Sudanese Vice-President Ali Osman Mohammed Taha visited Turkey after Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan stormed off the stage at the Davos meeting, accusing the Israelis of knowing how to kill people in Gaza, in

2009. According to former Turkish foreign minister and retired diplomat Ilter Turkmen it was “obvious that there is a contradiction in Erdogan’s approach toward Gaza and Darfur”. The president of the Turkish Human Rights Association, Ozturk Turkdogan, openly declared the visit to Turkey “an indication of the government’s double-standard policy.” A professor of international relations, Mensur Akgun, took a balanced approach and argued that if Taha did not come to Turkey for a discussion over finding a solution for Darfur, he continued, “it is not an accurate act on the part of Turkey” to receive him.<sup>22</sup> International reaction to the visits of the Sudanese leader to Turkey was also interesting. The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) tried to use the Sudanese-Turkish ties to legitimize its lobbying for the recognition of the Armenian genocide in Washington and elsewhere, even claiming that an “axis of genocide” had been established between Turkey and Sudan.<sup>23</sup> Due to the growing international criticism and pressure particularly from the EU, Sudanese President al Basher at the last minute had to cancel his official visit to Istanbul for an OIC meeting, hosted by Turkish President Abdullah Gül in November 2009.<sup>24</sup>

As a long-time strong Western ally and as a rising Muslim democratic state trying to join the EU and now also a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Turkey’s distinctive approach to Darfur and Khartoum requires a thorough detailed analysis. While the criticisms against Turkey may in reality have some validity, they do not provide much insight about what principles have been driving Turkey’s approach to Darfur. It can be argued that on the Darfur issue Turkey’s policy has been mainly shaped by three elements: the international environment/discourse on ‘the war on terror’, Turkey’s recently deepening engagement with Arabic world and Africa at economic and political levels since 2002, and Ankara’s search for a new political ‘language’ on Darfur, different from both the ‘genocide’ claims and a defense of al Basher. As will be elaborated below, we propose to call this policy as an example of *passive* quiet diplomacy.

### **Discourse on Genocide and the ‘War on Terror’**

Turkey’s interest in Darfur and its policy toward the conflict have been shaped by the international environment of the time, despite having some differences in its approach. Thus, it can be better understood within the war on terror context. During the first phase of the Darfur conflict, as mentioned above, the attention of the Muslim world was diverted by the Iraqi War as it weighed more heavily strategically, politically and economically due to its possible larger and long-term implications for Muslim states. Iraq also had more relevance for Turkey. Not only is Turkey a neighboring country to Iraq, but also the possible collapse of the cen-

tral government had an immediate threat to the unity and sovereignty of Turkey given the Kurdish issue. Therefore, Turkey was almost nonexistent in the debates on Darfur at the emerging stage of the conflict. In the second period, when Turkey started to show interest by hosting al Basher in Ankara, the genocide claims of the West were at its height.

Turkey's rejection of genocide claims has its own reasons. In an international environment where war on terror rhetoric is dominant and Arabs and Muslims are seen as or presented to be potential terrorists, it has been difficult, if not illogical, to accept the genocide argument in Darfur by the Muslim world and Turkey. Naming the conflict as genocide has had far-reaching results in political and legal terms and the argument of a possible genocide of Arab tribes and al Basher on Africans in Darfur were especially opposed by the Muslim world and Turkey "as yet another selective and unfair judgment" by the West.<sup>25</sup> Thus, neither Arab states nor the Arab League accepted the genocide claims. Turkey's approach to Darfur may have something to do with such a possible negative discourse in the war on terror environment. Possibly, because of this Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan questioned the charges against al Basher and said that "no Muslim could perpetrate a genocide", and "if there was such a thing [a genocide], we could talk about it face to face with President Basher," when asked about the situation in Darfur.<sup>26</sup> Preventing such a negative discourse was also important for Turkey while an East-West dialogue process was underway, especially when Turkey has been co-chairing 'the Alliance of Civilizations' project under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General to promote peace and harmony.

Erdoğan's insistence on the impossibility of a genocide conducted by Muslims has the characteristics of being a normative and political statement at the same time. It is normative because of Islamic values as *Quranic* verses are clearly against the killings of human beings. It is political because it was also in the period of intensive debates and discussions on the so-called Armenian genocide issue during which Erdoğan felt to explicitly state this. Similarly it was the period when the Armenian lobby in the US intensified its propaganda on the existence of an "axis of genocide" between Turkey and Sudan.<sup>27</sup> We believe that implicitly such a statement may have had an indirect reference to Turkey's own domestic and international politics through Darfur. In other words, Turkey explicitly avoided the genocide debates, be it on Darfur or Armenia, at the discursive level and this has shaped Turkey's approach to the Darfur conflict.

An illustrative example of Turkey's Darfur policy showed itself when the ICC indicted al Basher as the person behind the atrocities in Darfur.<sup>28</sup> After the ICC



decision, the West asked other countries to cooperate and support the ICC. However, neither the AU nor the Arab League expressed its willingness to cooperate with the ICC and asked that the decision be delayed, mostly on the grounds that it could threaten the peace process in Sudan. At the same time Turkey was a newly elected member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2009-2010, which forced Ankara to take sides. Ankara officially preferred to be silent about the issue but policy actions show that Ankara leaned towards demanding the postponement of the charges against al Basher. The fact that al Basher twice visited Turkey in 2008 amidst all the atrocities in Darfur was taken as a clear sign that Ankara was not willing to take up the Western line and alienate the Sudanese political leadership. Similarly, Turkish officials have gone on the record several times saying that Sudan's territorial integrity must be protected — a position in line with the AU. However, Turkey has expressed its unhappiness with the humanitarian tragedy in Darfur and several times diplomatically raised the issue with al Basher behind closed doors.<sup>29</sup> In a recent interview, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu argued that Turkey is “working on a way to provide a better dialogue between the parties in Darfur and the Sudanese government” and “when President al Basher came to Turkey, our [Turkish] president criticized him in a most sincere and open way”.<sup>30</sup>

In short, Turkey did not accept the international understanding of the Darfur conflict as genocide nor has it shared the rejection of prevailing violence in the region.<sup>31</sup> What Turkey tried to do, albeit unwittingly, was to create a new discourse on the issue, as will be discussed later. However, before proceeding to that discussion, the ways in which Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy affected its Darfur policy needs to be clarified.

### Limitations Imposed by a Multidimensional Foreign Policy

Turkey's Darfur policy has been in a delicate position due to its new multidimensional foreign policy which has included increasing ties with Africa and the Middle East. Ankara has been involved in every issue since the Iraqi War of 2003 not only in its surrounding regions (the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East) but also in distant regions such as Africa. However, while Turkey's influence to find a solution in certain conflicts has been on the rise, this increase in influence cannot be observed in others such as the Darfur conflict. This is not due to

Turkey's Darfur policy can be seen as an example of *passive* quiet diplomacy in a highly complex international environment in which Turkish foreign policy operates



Photo: A.A. Salih Zeki Fazlıoğlu

*Turkey has neither shared the Western perspective on Darfur nor exactly defended the position of the Arab world.*

Turkey's lack of interest but has more to do with global politics and the position of the states in those regions. For example, Turkey's Darfur policy has been influenced by both the position of the West and the regional players, namely the AU and the Arab League. As mentioned above, Ankara's position can even be seen as something in between the two while differing from them in certain aspects, because a closer look will indicate a quiet involvement of Turkey in the conflict while at the same time weighing and balancing its options, limitations and margins.

Turkey's Darfur policy has been constrained by international and regional involvements. On the one hand, its active involvement in every conflict, initiative and organization in its surrounding regions has tremendously increased Ankara's standing, influence and weight in its relations with regions such as the Middle East. On the other hand, such active involvement forces Turkey to be more careful and develop a rather ambiguous policy line in some areas so as not to jeopardize Turkey's relations with other actors or stakeholders in conflicts. What we see here is a sort of contradiction or side effect imposed by the multidimensional foreign

policy that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has put in place since taking office in 2002.

Turkey has clearly diversified its relations with other countries by developing economic and political ties with the AU, the Arab League and the OIC. Turkey now holds a strategic partnership status with the AU and a permanent invitee status with the Arab League. Turkey's economic and political ties with the Arab world and Africa have strengthened to a level that Ankara cannot take a strong political position toward any conflict in the region without considering what these organizations think, since acting otherwise could jeopardize its developing relations.

The Arab League took the position that the situation in Darfur was neither genocide nor ethnic cleansing and accused the US and the West of exploiting the situation.<sup>32</sup> However, as mentioned above, it was not this position that made Turkey have some commonality with the Arab world on the Darfur issue. There were basically two reasons which shaped and resulted in this virtual commonality between Turkey and the Arab world. First, economic and political relations have developed so much that Turkey cannot ignore the support of the Arab world on a policy for Darfur because Sudan is an important part of the Arab world. Considering that none of the Muslim states supported the genocide claims, a position siding with the Western world would not only exclude Turkey from the Muslim world but would also jeopardize its developing relations with Arab states as well. Secondly, the discourse on the war on terror and Islam as discussed earlier contributed in developing a commonality between the position of Turkey and the Arab world on Darfur; because the implication of a discursive equitation of Islam with terrorism would affect them substantially.

As discussed earlier, the AU has been central to the international response on Darfur. It played an active role to find a solution through the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) on Darfur, chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki. In general, there were two reasons why Turkey's policy was in common with the AU on Darfur. First, as was the case before the Iraqi War, Turkey in principle rejects external involvement in any country. In its foreign policy, Turkey has also frequently emphasized the principle of sovereignty. These principles were directly in line with the position of the AU on Darfur

Turkey's diplomatic alignment with the AU also seemingly goes well with its growing economic interests in Africa. Turkey is now emerging as a new economic player in Africa. Its trade with Africa has grown more than four times since 2002, reaching almost US\$17 billion in 2009.<sup>33</sup> An alignment with the genocide claims

Turkey never claimed, openly or officially, to be pursuing quiet diplomacy on the Darfur issue, but Turkish leaders have spoken to al Basher in an open way to cease the conflict and killings

and calls for external involvement would certainly influence Turkey's newly developing relations with the continent. Turkey's hosting of al Basher in Turkey twice in 2008 and Erdoğan's statements against the genocide claims after his visit to Darfur in 2006, following an Arab League summit in Khartoum, may be interpreted as political support to the position of the AU and the AL. Therefore, Turkey's

practical alignment of its position on the Darfur issue with the AU and the AL is not a mere coincidence or without reasons. There is a convergence of mutual interests and political understanding of the world politics, which was evidenced in the case of their approaches to the Darfur issue.

The OIC has also held the same position on the Darfur issue as other regional organizations such as the AU and the AL. In a statement, OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu said that "there was no evidence to support this [genocide] allegation" and urged the Sudanese government "to continue its investigations on the human rights violations in Darfur."<sup>34</sup> In general, the OIC supported negotiations in Doha and asked the international community to take concrete steps to support the efforts aimed at resolving the Darfur issue through the Doha process.<sup>35</sup> Considering Turkey's active involvement in the OIC and the election of a Turkish citizen as secretary-general, it is understandable that Turkey has sided with the OIC and other organizations at least in principle. Certainly, Turkey's approach to Darfur did not only converge with those organizations as part of its mere interest in those organizations; rather the convergence represents a common understanding and approach at minimum level.

### Searching for a New Language: *Passive Quiet Diplomacy?*

It has been argued so far that Turkey has neither shared the Western perspective on Darfur nor exactly defended the position of the Arab world. If that is so, what is Turkey's position on Darfur? In other words, does Turkey have a Darfur policy? In general, we argue that Turkey's Darfur policy can be seen as an example of *passive* quiet diplomacy in a highly complex international environment in which Turkish foreign policy operates.

The term 'quiet diplomacy' describes two things: first, the overall framework is diplomacy, rather than sanctions and military actions; while second, the adjective 'quiet' refers to the style of the diplomatic engagement defined as a combination

of measures that include behind the scene engagements, secret negotiations, and subtle coaxing.<sup>36</sup> Basically it is defined as “discussing problems with officials of another country in a calm way”.<sup>37</sup> In the literature, as Graham argues, the term ‘quiet diplomacy’ is used extensively to refer to many types of soft diplomatic initiatives but in a loose way without having any agreed definition.<sup>38</sup> However, for the purposes of this article, drawing on the existing literature<sup>39</sup> we define ‘quiet diplomacy’ using three characteristics.

The first and most important characteristic of any initiative that would be called quiet diplomacy is that there must be some sort of personal and direct diplomacy between the heads of states or governments. This is the most logical first step because only with such type of interaction could the initiator talk, reason and discuss the issue and be able to persuade his counterpart or involved parties in a conflict. This is also important as it shows the seriousness of the initiator and gives assurance to the other side that the initiator indeed cares about the issue in question and is interested in helping solve it. Despite criticism, the visit of Sudanese President Omar Al Basher twice in 2008 and several other meetings at international forums such as the Arab League summit in Khartoum was aimed to serve for this purpose: talking directly to the head of state and criticizing him “in a most sincere and open way”.<sup>40</sup> These meetings were also aimed at creating a balanced approach between the EU and the US’s position and those of the Arab and African countries.<sup>41</sup>

The second element of quiet diplomacy is that it has limited action economically and politically. Although this may invite criticism and disapproval, this is where quiet diplomacy departs from other forms of diplomacy because its main aim is persuasion, influence and pressure through an inaction strategy based on willingness. This inaction strategy based on willingness is also the weakest side that not only attracts many criticisms but also leaves states that engage quiet diplomacy in an awkward position in the eyes of international community. As a result, states pursue a very careful dialogue and engagement with the target country, which sometimes can be seen as being ineffectual and far from producing results in the short term.<sup>42</sup> It is a fact that Turkey’s Darfur policy has produced no direct result on the ground as far as it is reported in the world media. Therefore, Turkey’s hosting of al Basher is seen by many as support for him in the conflict. Turkey never claimed, openly or officially, to be pursuing quiet diplomacy on the Darfur issue, but Turkish leaders have spoken to al Basher in an open way to cease the conflict and killings.<sup>43</sup> Many saw Turkey’s effort as wasting time and as ineffective. Indeed, Turkey wanted to play a *passive* but a quiet diplomacy within the existing

possibilities of its diplomatic range. As the conflict divided the international community into the ‘for and against’, Turkey could only use quiet diplomacy and not speak about the issue to the media, while conducting behind-the-scene talks. We may never know the exact content of such talks but according to media reports Turkish leaders strongly urged al Basher to find a constructive solution to the conflict.<sup>44</sup> Turkey’s implementation of such passive diplomacy invited much criticism and led even to the claim of the existence of “an axis of genocide” between Turkey and Sudan.<sup>45</sup> In this situation, Turkey neither could defend its position by producing a new language, nor pave the way for a solution in the immediate future, but its sincere efforts to convince the Khartoum government to resolve the issue may have in an indirect way contributed to al Basher’s changing approach to Darfur.

The third characteristic of quiet diplomacy is that the states prefer their carefully planned constructive engagements to occur at bilateral and multilateral forums whenever possible. In some cases the initiators act as an unassigned appointee of a regional or international organization, while in others they are recognized officially as mediators, brokers or intermediaries. Turkey’s intensive constructive engagement in Darfur through international organizations only came to surface after the signing of the peace agreement. Turkey actively participated in the OIC’s Darfur Donors Conference held in Cairo on March 21, 2010, by co-chairing with Egypt and promised to donate US\$60-75 million to water, education and agriculture projects up to 2015.<sup>46</sup>

Quiet diplomacy usually occurs behind closed doors and tries to keep media coverage of the initiative low in order to prevent any sensation, outside involvement and high optimism. Nevertheless, states engaging in such diplomacy prefer to feed the media some stories, albeit in a brief form, in order to gain international support, credibility and even some sort of benefit for its foreign policy from its action. Turkey from the beginning did not inform the media in a sufficient way to explain its position on Darfur. Such a lack of an effective media strategy led many people to misinterpret Turkey’s involvement in the conflict. Had Turkey had an effective policy of conducting media relations, would Turkey have been less criticized for its Darfur approach is an open question. However, what would have happened is perhaps a healthier public discussion about Turkey’s Darfur policy.

Quiet diplomacy policy has been popularized as a result of the South African experience in Zimbabwe. Closer examination of that case reveals that such diplomacy has been appreciated by international community at least at the beginning as a way to keep communication channels open between the Mugabe regime and the outside world.<sup>47</sup> However, the main criticism was that such diplomacy is

too weak to produce a satisfactory outcome, is sometimes inconsistent with democratic ideals,<sup>48</sup> and does not bring any *quick solution* to the conflict if the situation is deteriorating. It has been the same with Turkey's Darfur policy: more criticism and no quick solution. Unlike the South African case, there has been no signal of appreciation from the international community that Turkey has kept the channels of communication open in the case of Darfur because such a role has been assumed mostly by international organizations such as the AU and the OIC. This may be also understandable considering that Turkey has never officially announced that it was following such a policy and the outside world has not perceived Turkey as doing so. That is why we tend to call Turkey's engagement as *passive* quiet diplomacy, compared to that of South Africa. The term *passive*, however, is not intended to mean ineffective, rather it means not accepting such a policy as an official position.

Quiet diplomacy use soft power engagement as part of its constructive engagement. It pursues economic and social programs to develop the country in question. Ankara has utilized economic imperatives toward Darfur and this has facilitated Ankara's work behind doors in urging al Basher to end the conflict. Turkey has traditionally enjoyed strong trade links with Sudan compared to other African countries. With the process of multidimensionalism in Turkish foreign policy, there have been advances in the fields of trade, agriculture, health, security, construction, energy and education with Sudan. While the foreign trade volume between Ankara and Khartoum was only US\$35 million in 2002, it increased in 2007 to US\$200 million. Turkey exports to Sudan mainly machinery, iron, steel, automotive and spare parts, and even arms.<sup>49</sup> It is believed that 80 Turkish firms have operations in Sudan, exceeding US\$300 million in investments.<sup>50</sup> The Turkish official development agency, Turkish International Development and Cooperation Agency (TIKA), has had an office in Khartoum since 2006 and has contributed to a number of projects ranging from agriculture to the health sector. Along with official humanitarian agencies, *Kizilay* (the Turkish red crescent) and some other Turkish humanitarian NGOs have significant projects in Sudan. The Cataract project of the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH) stands out as it has assisted more than 15,000 people through a medical surgery to open their eyesight. While Ankara has founded a hospital in Darfur's capital Nyala, which offers its service to those in need of medical care, the

Ankara's policy on Darfur is basically a strategy of *passive* quiet diplomacy and constructive engagement, supported by developing economic and political ties

Turkey could not clearly explain its intention to create, albeit in a passive way, a new language on Darfur in order to escape the 'for and against' dilemma about the role of al Basher in Darfur and the essence of the conflict

Ankara Chamber of Industry is working to establish an industrial zone in Khartoum.

Soft power engagement is vital in pursuing quiet diplomacy. All of these intensive engagements of civil society organizations, business and official Turkish development and aid agencies in Sudan indicate the level of constructive involvement of Ankara in the country. These

soft power elements have enhanced Turkey's position when Turkish leaders urged Sudanese leaders to end the conflict.

### Conclusion

In this article, we have critically examined Turkey's highly debated approach to the Darfur conflict. We have found that Turkey has not aligned itself with the Western position of criticizing the Sudanese government and its leader al Basher by describing the developments in Darfur as genocide and it has not ignored the developments and human tragedy in its relations with Sudan. Ankara's policy on Darfur is basically a strategy of *passive* quiet diplomacy and constructive engagement, supported by developing economic and political ties. This policy seems to be in contradiction with the position taken by Washington and Brussels on Darfur, but has some commonality with the standings of the Arab world as well as African and Muslim states in general. That means that Turkey's growing economic and political engagements with the non-Western world has now come to play a constraining role in Turkish foreign policy. It further implies that Turkey may face similar challenges in handling difficult cases such as Iran's nuclear activities, as recently evidenced with its diverging position within the UN Security Council regarding the new sanctions against Iran.

Many states seem to attach greater value to softer foreign policy strategies and quieter ways of solving conflicts. Indeed such aspects have been seen in Turkish foreign policy with its involvement in negotiations between Israel and Syria, Serbia and Bosnia, and other regional conflicts. However, Turkey could not clearly explain its intention to create, albeit in a passive way, a new language on Darfur in order to escape the 'for and against' dilemma about the role of al Basher in Darfur and the essence of the conflict. We have argued that the international environment with the war on terror and limitations of Turkey's developing multidimensional foreign policy, especially in the Middle East and Africa, have also determined Tur-



key's taking up a *passive* stance on the issue, leaving it to international organizations. However, despite its intentions, it was also not able to produce a convincing alternative to the situation, thus inviting criticism in Turkey and abroad. Turkey mainly aimed to prevent its relations with Sudan and other regional actors from being harmed while trying to convince Sudan against a possible intensification of the internal clashes. Turkey's role in the Darfur case may only be better understood if Turkish leaders would openly explain what went on behind the closed doors, perhaps only after a sustained and internationally approved political solution has been achieved in Sudan. What is obvious is that the Muslim world and Africa have failed to develop a winning strategy in the Darfur conflict beyond showing political solidarity with the Sudanese government in the form of an anti-imperialist stance in the face of the ICC indictment.

## Endnotes

1. Ahmet Alibasic, "Where's the Muslim outrage over Darfur?," *The Wall Street Journal* (Europe), March 10, 2009.

2. Aijaz Zaka Syed, "Darfur, Muslim world's shame," *The Khaleej Times*, November 11, 2006.

3. It is true that 'genocide' claim has been only made officially by various US officials including then US Senators Barack Obama (2005) and Hillary Clinton (2006), Israeli officials (2006), French foreign minister (2006) and Portugal assembly (2007). However, there has been a strong tendency among international (read Western) media to see and report the killings as 'genocide'. This created an environment in which many people, at public and official levels, believe that killings in Darfur were no less than 'genocide'. For the international response see "A timeline of the Darfur crisis and the response of the international community," retrieved September 6, 2010, from [http://www.darfurconsortium.org/darfur\\_crisis/timeline.html](http://www.darfurconsortium.org/darfur_crisis/timeline.html).

4. See the UN Security Council Resolution 1769, July 31, 2007, retrieved September 6, 2010, from [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1769%282007%29](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1769%282007%29).

5. This part is primarily based on BBC webpage on Darfur, retrieved June 10, 2010, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3496731.stm>.

6. Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2009), p. 32.

7. There is huge debate about this number as it is usually used as a political motivation to show the 'greatness' of the brutality, and the numbers increased and decreased from time to time depending on agencies that release the statistics. For an excellent summary, presentation and discussion about numbers can be found in Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*, pp. 25-39.

8. Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*, p. 33.

9. "AU criticizes ICC ruling on Bashir genocide charges," retrieved April 10, 2010, from <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34022>.

10. "Arab leaders back 'wanted' Bashir," retrieved April 5, 2010, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7971624.stm>.

11. "OIC asks ICC and UN Security Council to cancel ICC decision against president of the republic," retrieved April 10, 2010, from <http://www.sol-sd.com/print.php?a=3408>.

12. We are grateful to Serhat Orakci for this point. See also “War in Sudan’s Darfur ‘is over,” retrieved August 27, 2009, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8224424.stm>.

13. See “Darfur death toll rises to two-year high in Sudan,” retrieved June 7, 2010, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/africa/10259604.stm>.

14. See “Arab and Muslim public opinion takes the lead on Darfur,” retrieved February 10, 2010, from [http://aai.3cdn.net/c57541b60f206b0297\\_cmm6brl5d.pdf](http://aai.3cdn.net/c57541b60f206b0297_cmm6brl5d.pdf); James J. Zogby, “Arabs express concern over Darfur,” *Jordan Times*, May 15, 2007.

15. Quoted in Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*, p. 295.

16. As an indication of clear disparity between public sentiment and official position, for example, in March 2007, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak ‘flatly rejected’ a request by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon to put more pressure on Mr. Basher to end the conflict. See “Intolerable Darfur,” *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2007.

17. Darfur is not an exception. Such a lack of knowledge in Turkey is valid for all conflicts and issues in Africa, see Mehmet Özkan, *Turkey Discovers Africa: Implications and Prospects*, Ankara: SETA Policy Brief 22, 2008; and Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün, “Turkey’s opening to Africa,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.48, No.4, (2010), pp. 525-546

18. Nadim Hasbani, “About the Arab stance vis-à-vis Darfur,” *Al-Hayat* (March 21, 2007), retrieved December 21, 2009, from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4722>.

19. See the UN Mission’s Contribution by Country, retrieved December 22, 2009, from [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2009/nov09\\_5.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2009/nov09_5.pdf).

20. See “Five Darfur rebel delegations arrive in Qatar,” retrieved December 23, 2009, from <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article30969>.

21. See “Sudan peace accord signed, state media reports,” retrieved May 2, 2010, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/02/23/sudan.peace.agreement/index.html>.

22. Fulya Özerkan, “Domestic double standards in Darfur policies,” *Hürriyet*, February 4, 2009.

23. See “Armenians use Turkey-Sudan tie for recognition,” *Turkish Daily News*, February 23, 2009.

24. See “Bashir cancels visit to Istanbul,” retrieved April 10, 2010, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8349678.stm>.

25. Eric A. Heinze, “The rhetoric of genocide in US foreign policy: Rwanda and Darfur compared,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.122, No.3, (2007), pp. 377-378; Alex de Wall, “Who are the Darfurians? Arab and African identities, violence and external engagement,” *African Affairs*, Vol.104, No.415, (2005), pp. 200-201.

26. See “Bashir cancels visit to Istanbul,” retrieved April 10, 2010, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8349678.stm>.

27. See, Armenian National Committee of America, (February 18 2009), retrieved May 5, 2010, from [http://www.anca.org/assets/pdf/hill\\_notes/021809.pdf](http://www.anca.org/assets/pdf/hill_notes/021809.pdf).

28. See the ICC’s official document, “Warrant of arrest of Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir,” retrieved September 6, 2010, from <http://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/doc/doc639078.pdf>.

29. *Today’s Zaman*, March 2, 2009.

30. Interview with Ahmet Davutoglu, *Newsweek*, November 28, 2009.

31. See “Turkey’s Gul urges Sudan leader to end suffering,” retrieved June 10, 2010, from [http://www.sudaneseonline.com/en2/publish/Latest\\_News\\_1/Turkey\\_s\\_Gul\\_urges\\_Sudan\\_leader\\_to\\_end\\_suffering.shtml](http://www.sudaneseonline.com/en2/publish/Latest_News_1/Turkey_s_Gul_urges_Sudan_leader_to_end_suffering.shtml).

32. Moataz El Fegiery and Ridwan Ziyada, "The tragedy of Darfur, double standards being applied," (2007), retrieved December 22, 2009, from [http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show\\_article.php/\\_c-476/\\_nr-732/i.html](http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-732/i.html).

33. Turkish PM, the Undersecretary of Foreign Trade, retrieved May 3, 2010, from <http://www.dtm.gov.tr>.

34. See the Secretary-General's statement on Darfur, retrieved December 20, 2009, from [http://www.oic-oci.org/topic\\_detail.asp?t\\_id=2858&x\\_key=darfur](http://www.oic-oci.org/topic_detail.asp?t_id=2858&x_key=darfur).

35. See the Secretary-General's statement on Darfur, retrieved December 20, 2009, from [http://www.oic-oci.org/topic\\_detail.asp?t\\_id=2858&x\\_key=darfur](http://www.oic-oci.org/topic_detail.asp?t_id=2858&x_key=darfur).

36. Kuseni Dlamini, "Is quiet diplomacy an effective conflict resolution strategy?," *South African Yearbook of International Affairs*, 2002/03 (Johannesburg: SAIIA, 2003), p. 171.

37. Peter H. Collin, *Dictionary of Government and Politics* (Middlesex: Peter Collin, 1997), p. 89.

38. Victoria Graham, "A Comparison of South Africa's Quiet Diplomacy towards Nigeria and Zimbabwe", Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2004, p. 25.

39. Among others, see Graham, "A Comparison of South Africa's Quiet Diplomacy towards Nigeria and Zimbabwe", and Victoria Graham, "How firm the handshake? South Africa's use of quiet diplomacy in Zimbabwe from 1999 to 2006," *African Security Review*, Vol.15, No.4 (2006), pp. 113-127; Martin Adelman, "Quiet diplomacy: the reasons behind Mbeki's Zimbabwe policy," *Africa Spectrum*, Vol.39, No.2 (2004), pp. 249-276; and Miriam Prys, "Regional hegemon or regional bystander: South Africa's Zimbabwe policy 2000-2005," *Politikon*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2009), pp. 193-218.

40. Interview with Ahmet Davutoglu, *Newsweek*, November 28, 2009.

41. Cansu Arisoy, "What is happening between Turkey and Darfur?," (March 26, 2010), retrieved May 5, 2010, from [http://www.bilgesam.com/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=256:what-is-happening-between-turkey-and-darfur&catid=80:analizler-afrika&Itemid=138](http://www.bilgesam.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=256:what-is-happening-between-turkey-and-darfur&catid=80:analizler-afrika&Itemid=138).

42. Graham, "A Comparison of South Africa's Quiet Diplomacy towards Nigeria and Zimbabwe", p. 27.

43. "Turkey urges Sudan to resolve Darfur," *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 2008.

44. See "Turkey's Gul urges Sudan leader to end suffering," retrieved June 10, 2010, from [http://www.sudaneseonline.com/en2/publish/Latest\\_News\\_1/Turkey\\_s\\_Gul\\_urges\\_Sudan\\_leader\\_to\\_end\\_suffering.shtml](http://www.sudaneseonline.com/en2/publish/Latest_News_1/Turkey_s_Gul_urges_Sudan_leader_to_end_suffering.shtml).

45. See, Armenian National Committee of America (February 18, 2009), retrieved May 5, 2010, from [http://www.anca.org/assets/pdf/hill\\_notes/021809.pdf](http://www.anca.org/assets/pdf/hill_notes/021809.pdf).

46. See, [http://www.worldbulletin.net/news\\_detail.php?id=55785](http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=55785), May 5, 2010.

47. Adelman, "Quiet diplomacy: the reasons behind Mbeki's Zimbabwe policy," p. 252.

48. For example see, Ian Taylor, "Zimbabwe's debacle, Africa's response and the implication for the New Partnership on Africa's Development (NEPAD)," Henning Melber (ed.), *Zimbabwe's Presidential Elections 2002, Evidence, Lessons and Implications*, (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), pp. 68-75.

49. According to Human Rights First, Turkey sold Sudan equivalent of \$121.867 arms between 2004-2006. See "Arm sales to Sudan, 2004-2006," retrieved August 22, 2009, from <http://www.stoparmstosudan.org/pages.asp?id=37>.

50. Hasan Kanbolat, "Turkey and Sudan: Darfur and trade," *Today's Zaman*, January 29, 2009.