

AK Party's Foreign Policy: Is Turkey Turning Away from the West?

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ABSTRACT

This article agrees that there is a transformation in Turkish foreign policy. It suggests that the changes in foreign policy are not aimed to de-Westernize Turkey; instead they are attempts to create an autonomous, self-regulating, and self-confident foreign policy agenda while normalizing the previous crisis-driven policymaking in Turkey's foreign relations. These changes include: broadening of Turkey's foreign policy agenda to include regions other than Europe and North America, using the expertise of new actors in shaping foreign policy (such as civil experts and NGOs) and transforming decision making mechanisms to incorporate new initiatives. In fact, this article, while not denying some recurring problems in Turkey's foreign policy, suggests that Turkey is not turning away from the West; but striving to reconfigure and reformulate its foreign policy, reflecting the demands of an increasingly open and democratic society and adapting to the realities of a multi-polar world.

It has become commonplace for certain analysts of Turkish politics to criticize Turkish foreign policy making during the Justice and Development Party's (AK Parti) tenure for turning away from the West and leaning towards the Middle East.¹ According to these analysts, the AK Party, in general, and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, in particular, have a hidden agenda of "Middle Easternization" of Turkish society and politics and aim to divert the direction of Turkish foreign policy away from its previous pro-Western foreign policy orientation. Moreover, this agenda, it is argued, constitutes an existential threat not only to Turkey's secular and democratic regime but also to the decades old cooperation and dialogue between Turkey and the Western world.²

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to create an autonomous, self-regulating, and self-confident foreign policy agenda and normalize the previous crisis-driven foreign policymaking of Turkey. These changes include: the broadening of Turkey's foreign policy agenda to include regions other than Europe and North America, the insertion of new actors in shaping foreign policy (such as civil experts and NGOs) and the modification

in decision making mechanisms to incorporate these changes. In fact, this article, while not denying some recurring problems in Turkey's foreign policy, suggests that Turkey is not turning away from the West; but striving to reconfigure and reformulate its foreign policy, reflecting the demands of an increasingly open and democratic society and adapting to the realities of a multi-polar world.

AK Party in Power

These debates and discussions on Turkish foreign policy center on the Justice and Development Party. The AK Party and its leadership, especially Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, and Ahmet Davutoglu, were held responsible for the "re-orientation" of Turkish foreign policy, by observers of Turkish politics.

The AK Party was founded in August, 2001 by the reformist members of the Virtue Party.³ Shortly after its formation, in 2002, the AK Party won an unprecedented electoral victory in decades and obtained 34 percent of the vote and almost two thirds of the seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Despite the concerns of some ultra-secular groups, the AK Party leadership signaled a conciliatory tone after the elections. Erdogan, in his victory speech after the election, emphasized his willingness to work with people from all walks of life in Turkey and promised to be the leader of not only those who voted for him but of all Turkish citizens.⁴

Shortly after the elections, the government initiated policy openings and reforms in different spheres, most importantly in the realm of foreign policy. On election night, the newly elected Erdogan signaled a change on a number of key issues in Turkish foreign policy. He stressed the importance of the European integration process for Turkey, which was a strong deviation from the mainstream Islamist discourse in foreign policy. He underscored his readiness to negotiate a solution to the Cyprus problem with the Greek side based upon the parameters set by Kofi Annan, which was a departure from traditional Turkish foreign policy

on Cyprus and Greece. He also expressed his concern about the war in Iraq, signaling a form of resistance to US demands in the region.

Initially observers of Turkish politics evaluated this new discourse in foreign policy with suspicion. They viewed the AK Party government's new foreign policy approach as a strategic and pragmatic move to gain international legitimacy and a way to distract public opinion from their real policy agendas. However, the AK Party's foreign policy discourse proved to be more than temporary and tactical shifts away from mainstream Turkish foreign policy. In addition, it was a departure from the foreign policy perspective of earlier Islamic movements and parties, including the National Outlook Movement of Necmettin Erbakan. Unlike Erbakan, whose first stop as Prime Minister was to Iran, Erdogan paid his first visit to a Western neighbor, Greece, just two weeks after the elections. It was also far from being reminiscent of the political adventurism of Erbakan, who had dedicated his days in office to form an alliance with the Middle Eastern and African states. This pattern and performance was something unexpected from the AK Party, a political party whose founding leader, Erdogan, had been convicted and served time in prison for "inciting religious hatred among society."⁵

Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul together have been trying to accelerate the membership process to the EU, and follow a "zero-problem policy with Turkey's neighbors," starting with Greece and Cyprus. At the beginning of the AK Party's tenure, observers projected an extremely dependent relationship with the US because the AK Party needed international legitimacy. Moreover, this impression was bolstered when Erdogan received a very warm welcome during his first visit to Washington DC. So, it came as a surprise to both Turkish public opinion and international observers when the AK Party government resisted US demands before the occupation of Iraq in 2003 and by trying to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy in the Middle East. In later years, the AK Party government strengthened this new foreign policy approach by involving different regions and integrating different foreign policy problems. This new approach includes: increasing economic cooperation with different economies of the world; being proactive in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially during the Israeli incursions into Gaza during the winter of 2008-2009; initiating diplomatic efforts on the question of Iran's nuclear bid; and taking part in various international organizations and initiatives.

Restructuring Foreign Policy

When the AK Party government took power in 2002, Turkey was trying to recover from the worst financial crisis in its history. In addition, Turkey had

achieved candidate country status in the Helsinki Summit in December 1999 and there were high expectations among Turkish society about EU membership process. More importantly, the new government found itself in a debate regarding the US plan to invade Iraq and Turkey's possible role in the invasion.⁶ Immediately after the elections, several high level meetings took place between the US and Turkish governments. Ankara had stated Turkey's concerns about a possible US invasion, including the future of the Kurdish question, the possible economic loss that Turkey would suffer, and the support that Turkey may need in case of an Iraqi attack against Turkey.⁷ The negotiations between Turkish and American officials regarding the launching of US troops from the Turkish soil and the related March 1st vote in the Turkish parliament were among the first signs of a new era in Turkish foreign policy. Unlike the First Gulf War, this time the Turkish government was more resilient to US demands and more assertive with respect to its own priorities. In addition, Turkish society was also willing to be more influential in the decision making process on international issues than it used to be. The anti-war demonstrations that took place in different parts of Turkey were on an unprecedented scale. The polls revealed the Turkish public's disapproval of Turkey's contribution to the war effort in Iraq.⁸ An important segment of the Turkish media supported the anti-war position of the public by eliciting increased information and providing extensive coverage. Turkish intellectuals were very critical of the AK Party for even beginning to negotiate with the US government. Therefore, the AK Party leadership felt strong pressure from its electorate and other anti-war demonstrators regarding this critical foreign policy decision and tried to balance an increasingly attentive public and a half-a-century-old strategic partnership.

Eventually, the permission for US ground troops to launch from Turkish soil was not granted by the Turkish parliament and a crisis erupted between Turkey and the US. This crisis reached its peak when several Turkish military personnel, operating in the Northern Iraq, were captured by American soldiers on the 4th of July of the same year. The decision of the parliament surprised everyone, including foreign observers, the US administration and the leaders of the AK Party itself. However, this was only an early sign of the changes in Turkish foreign policy that were to follow.

Professor Ihsan Dagi of the Middle East Technical University dates this change back to the EU integration process and calls it "a liberal turn in Turkish foreign policy." According to him, this liberal turn rescued Turkey from its past fears and insecurities and taught Turkish people to look at its foreign policy issues and regional affairs from a different point of view.⁹ This process of change accelerated and

solidified with the AK Party government. Both pro-AK Party and anti-AK Party observers of Turkish policy agree that there has been a transformation in Turkish foreign policy. For some, including the political analyst Graham Fuller, the changes in foreign policy making are so critical and so significant that the Turkey, which emerges from these changes should be called "The New Turkish Republic."¹⁰

So, what really caused these drastic changes in Turkish foreign policy?

Bringing the Middle East in

For the majority of the 20th century, since the inception of the new Turkish Republic, Turkey maintained minimal relations with the newly independent nation-states in the Middle East and politically followed a non-involvement and non-interference policy towards most of the Middle Eastern countries. Polarization during the Cold War solidified this alienation and supported Turkey's (mostly) identity based avoidance. For decades, other than a few Cold War alliances including Baghdad and Sadabad Pacts and economic cooperation, such as increasing economic relations with the region after the oil crisis, Turkish governments had maintained this position and had equated friendly relations with the Middle Eastern countries as a possible threat to the Westernization process. Meanwhile, the policies of the United States in the region were supported and in later years Israel was considered the only country that Turkey could keep cooperative and stable relationship in the Middle East.

The Ozal era in the 1980s brought about an important shift in this "avoidance" of the Middle East. In the first years of the Ozal government, Ankara tried to benefit from Middle Eastern capital to revive its economy. Prime Minister Ozal also pursued a policy of "active neutrality" during the Iran-Iraq War.¹¹ However, it was not until the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces in 1990 that a dramatic change in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East would take place. After many years of non-involvement in bilateral conflicts between Middle Eastern countries and non-interference in domestic politics of individual countries, Turkey under Turgut Ozal's leadership changed its conventional foreign policy by participating in the allied coalition in the First Gulf War. With this policy change in the last years of the Cold War, Ozal's goal was to demonstrate Turkey's continued geopolitical relevance to the Western world in post-Cold War and its capability to become a regional actor in the Middle East.¹² However, after the war, Turkey's relations with the region deteriorated in conjunction with its own domestic problems. First, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Turkey was suspicious of Iran's intention of exporting the revolution to Turkey. This was further exacerbated by the global rise

of political Islam combined with the domestic electoral victories of the Welfare Party in Turkey. These events triggered paranoia in Ankara and impacted Turkey's relations with the Iranian regime and Arab governments. Second, the Kurdish question in general, and the PKK problem in particular, posed serious challenges for Turkey's leadership. Moreover, Syria and Iraq's logistical support for the members of the PKK were resented by the Turkish government and public. For many scholars, including Sayari and Altunisik, the Kurdish question was, in fact, the most important factor in Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors.¹³

In the 1990s, another fundamental development that occurred was Turkey's rapprochement with Israel, which had the effect of further alienating most Middle Eastern Arab countries from Turkey. A brief hiatus in this policy took place during Erbakan's short tenure as he tried to repair relations with the countries in the region. However, his anti-Western attitude and the reaction of Turkey's state establishment to this policy change brought about more harm than good. Relations with Syria deteriorated to the point of a significant crisis and Turkey's threat of military intervention because of Syria's harboring of the PKK and its hosting of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of PKK. It was not until 1998, when Syria agreed to the deportation of Ocalan from Syria, did the first step in normalization of relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors begin.

The AK Party leadership that came to power following the 2002 elections further intensified the process of normalization in the Middle East. The Turkish government, while passing reform packages to launch accession negotiations with the EU, had also spent a lot of time and energy in order to build friendly and cooperative relations with the Middle Eastern countries and to play a more active role in the region's politics. As part of this strategy, the Turkish government started to approach the Middle East from a multidimensional perspective, abstracting itself from the Kurdish question. Even the rise of PKK terrorism after the invasion of Iraq by the US didn't stop the Turkish government from launching bilateral and multilateral diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East.

Several policy changes took place during this period. Firstly, the Turkish government attempted to become more active in regional and other multilateral institutions. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, a Turkish scholar, has become the general secretary of the Organization of Islamic Conference in 2004 and Turkey gained the status of observer in the Arab League.¹⁴ In addition, Turkey increased its business and strategic relations with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.¹⁵ Secondly, with a proactive diplomacy, Turkey also started to repair its relations with its neighbors. Bilateral relations with Syria had historically been poor since the

establishment of the Turkish Republic. The normalization of relations in the late 1990s was later underscored by high level attendance to Hafiz Asad's funeral. After the funeral, the new Syrian president Bashar al-Assad visited Ankara, the first trip of a Syrian President to Ankara.¹⁶ Diplomatic interactions and high level visits increased dramatically between Ankara and Damascus. Contrary to the claims of some observers, who interpreted these summits as part of the AK Party's hidden Islamic agenda, the ultra secular president of Turkey Ahmet Necdet Sezer also conformed with the policy change and paid an official visit to Damascus during his presidency. The relations between the two countries improved through growing economic and political ties. This led to Turkey's mediation of the indirect talks between Syria and Israel in 2008, and between Syria and Iraq in 2009 (after a deepening crisis regarding insurgency bombings in Iraq and cancellations of visa requirements for both countries).¹⁷ In addition, Turkey and Syria also signed a technical military cooperation agreement and in April 2009 they launched their first joint military exercise.¹⁸

Thirdly, Turkey also launched mutual economic and political cooperation with other Middle Eastern countries, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. High level visits between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries have become a commonplace during the AK Party government. One of the most significant developments took place between Turkey and Qatar. In addition to high level exchanges, Turkey and Qatar increased their economic cooperation, which later spilled over to energy, security and foreign policy fields. In addition to the increasing volume of trade and economic cooperation, the parties also agreed to set up a committee on energy cooperation. Furthermore, Turkey and Qatar also played an active role to solve regional disputes, including the conflict between Syria and Israel.¹⁹ The economic and strategic relations with other Gulf countries, including Kuwait and United Arab Emirates prospered in these years.²⁰ The relations with Saudi Arabia also improved in a great extent during the AK Party government. King Abdullah visited Turkey for the first time in 2006, which was also the first visit of its kind in 40 years. In 2007 he paid another visit with Saudi Foreign Minister as well as businessmen and investors from Saudi Arabia.²¹ The high level exchanges continued with the visit of the President Abdullah Gul to Saudi Arabia in 2009 and Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu's visit in January 2010. New bilateral agreements were signed during these visits and both the volume of trade and cooperation increased in a great extent.

Scholars including Bulent Aras interpreted this achievement as a result of successful use of "soft power," which consists of Turkey's new image in the Middle

East with its rising civil-economic power in the region.²² In this period, Turkish foreign policy makers utilized almost all possible means of diplomacy, including personal diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and even sports diplomacy, which was also used in Turkey's rapprochement with Armenia. This proactive peace making and conflict resolution diplomacy in the Middle East was partly an outcome of Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero-problem with neighbors" policy, which prioritizes Turkey's desire to resolve disputes with its neighbors over projecting its strength and influence in the region. Relations with emerging Iraq developed by following these principles. Although serious questions remain to be solved, including the issue of Kirkuk and the PKK problem, in recent years, especially after Talabani's visit to Turkey and Gul's visit to Baghdad, Turkey has started to establish an expand its relationship with the new Iraqi state.²³ Various bilateral agreements were signed by the parties, which extend the scope of bilateral cooperation. At the same time, Ankara also contributed to the political stability and territorial integrity of Iraq by following and leading different diplomatic paths, such as "the Platform for Iraqi Neighbours," which met for the first time in Istanbul in 2003 to find a peaceful solution of disputes among Iraq and its neighbors and continued its activities after the Iraq War."²⁴

Beyond bilateral relations, after decades-long non-involvement and non-interference in the domestic politics of countries and regional disputes, Turkey has also started to involve itself in the resolution of regional disputes aiming to provide peaceful and effective solutions. Turkey has become a mediator and facilitator among different parties and in different regional conflicts. Ankara became a mediator between Syria and Iraq as well as between Syria and Israel in last few years. In addition, the Turkish government also tried to mediate between the Sunni and Shiites in Iraq and attempted to contribute to the resolution of disputes between the Sunnis of Iraq and the Americans.

Under the AK Party government, Turkey has also taken some bold and politically risky initiatives in foreign policy despite domestic and external criticisms and concerns. For example, the AK Party government invited the leaders of Hamas, including Halid Meshal, as well as Shia political leaders of Iraq, including Muqtada al-Sadr, to Ankara in order to express Turkey's concerns and demands, as well as to listen to their conditions and priorities. Furthermore, Ankara has also sent Turkish troops to Lebanon as a part of the UN peace keeping mission after the conflict between Hizbullah and Israel. These mediation attempts and hostings increased Turkey's international profile both in the Middle East and in global politics.



Photo: A.A., Yasin Aras

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This change in focus also resulted in conflict of interests and approaches between Turkey and the other regional actors, including Western countries. While Turkey was trying to position itself in and place its stamp on regional politics after long years of absence, Western policymakers observed the sudden and assertive presence of Turkey in the region with a great interest. Although in some circumstances the policies of the AK Party government were interpreted as an ideological reconfiguration of foreign policy with expansionist goals, Ankara was simply trying to be a policy-producer in the Middle East instead of being a “policy-implementer” in accordance with the policies of the United States and Europe in the region. It was also trying to be pro-actively engaged in regionally significant issues instead of shying away from involvement. Turkey’s pro-active peacemaking strategy has been sometimes applauded and sometimes criticized. This was most obvious during and after the discussions between the Turkish Prime Minister and the Israeli President during the World Economic Forum meeting at Davos, also known as the “One Minute” crisis. That crisis invited both criticism as well as praise for the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan’s reaction to Israel’s incursions into Gaza. However, in both instances, the increasing engagement of Turkey in the Middle East transformed Turkey’s position from a bridge to a regional and global

player, as recognized by different world leaders including Hillary Clinton, as well as the Arab public in the Middle East.

Going Global

The shift of focus in Turkish foreign policy was not limited to the Middle East. The AK Party government tried to extend its focus and involvement to other regions of the world as well. Erdogan has become the most traveled prime minister of the Turkish Republic. In each and every capital they visit, the representatives of the Turkish government attempt to establish economic partnerships as well as political cooperation. In addition to bilateral initiatives, the AK Party government also facilitates broad regional initiatives in order to build bridges with different continents and countries.

As a part of these regional openings, the year 2005 was declared as “the Year of Africa”. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Turkish state had largely ignored this continent and had not attempted to cooperate with the countries of this region. With the Africa Year initiative, Turkey has started to open embassies in different capitals on the African continent, and Turkish foreign policy makers paid high level visits to the African capitals in order to build political and economic ties with these countries. In order to close the gap in the relations which was caused by decades of mutual neglect, both Ankara and African capitals have launched ambitious and aggressive policy initiatives to jump-start a new era of cooperation.²⁵

This rapprochement with Africa is not a temporary opening, limited to the year of 2005. 2005 was only a triggering year for the construction of more durable ties with the African countries. After 2005, the connections between Turkey and African countries continue to flourish. Both business associations, including Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) and the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) and government agencies, including Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) organized meeting and conferences with their African counterparts in order to diversify the type of relations between Africa and Turkey.²⁶ In addition, Turkey’s attempts to make these newly emerging ties more permanent resulted in a meeting in Istanbul in 2008, which was called “Solidarity and Partnership for a Common Future”.²⁷ As a result of the political and economic entrepreneurship of Turkey in Africa, Turkey economically increased the level of trade with the African countries from 5 billion in 2003 to 12 billion in 2007²⁸ and 19 billion in 2008²⁹ and politically acquired the support of the African nations in its run for one of the non-permanent seats in United Nations Security Council.

Africa was not the only opening for Turkish foreign policy in these years. The multidimensionality of Turkish foreign policy also included other regions of the world as well. For instance, Turkey, during the last couple of years, has tried to reach out to Latin America. The Turkish Foreign Ministry declared the year 2007 as “the year of Latin America” in Turkish foreign policy. The high level visits

between Turkey and the Latin American countries included the visit of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to Turkey (the first presidential visit by a Brazilian president to Turkey); the visit of Tayyip Erdogan to Mexico;³⁰ the visit of the then foreign minister of Turkey, Abdullah Gul with a crowded delegation to Latin American capitals; and the trip of a delegation of Turkish businessmen led by Foreign Trade Undersecretary Tuncer Kayalar to Paraguay and Uruguay.³¹ Similar to the African initiative, new economic and political ties were built between Turkey and these countries, including the establishment of the Brazilian-Turkish economic council.³² New strategies and new ways of communication have been crafted in order to increase the level of cooperation with these countries, including increasing the number of flights to the region's capitals.

Meanwhile, Turkey extended its economic relations with Russia and attempted to become involved in the regional crisis in the Caucasus, including the Russian-Georgia Crisis and the Nagorno Karabakh dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan.³³ More importantly, Turkey has tried to establish cordial relations with its other Eastern neighbor, Armenia. Considering the significance of the “Armenian Question” for Turkey's domestic and foreign policy over the past decades and considering the very close relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, the rapprochement was one of the most remarkable moves of Turkish foreign policy. As a part of this opening, Turkish and Armenian foreign ministers signed an accord in Zurich in order to normalize relations. In addition, the Turkish government has also been actively working for the resolution of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia through the Minsk group.

The AK Party leadership has also gone global in terms of its involvement in international organizations. While continuing to build the bridge between East and West by the co-chairmanship of the Alliance of Civilizations program of the United Nations together with Spain,³⁴ Turkey also attempted to be an agenda set-

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ter globally by playing an active role in all kinds of conflict resolution efforts and by increasing its engagement and initiatives. As part of this global foreign policy, Turkey gained a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council and demonstrated its foreign policy activism also in regional organizations, such as the observer

status it acquired from the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and the Organization of the American States (OAS).³⁵

In fact, what was considered to be a turning away from the Western world is less a turning away from the West and more of an extension of Turkey's foreign policy agenda to include more diverse capitals around the world. Philip Robbins in an interview summarized this change as follows:

Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party is definitely more geographically rounded than was the case before. In previous years, the overwhelming priority was on 'Western' issues, from NATO to relations with the US and of course with the EU. The Middle East and the Islamic world more generally were regarded as lower priorities, largely ignored or simply reduced to one or two core issues, such as terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. Under the AK Party relations with the Middle East have been revalued, but without devaluing those with the West.³⁶

In addition to these changes in the focus of foreign policy making, Turkey, during the AK Party government, also experienced a transformation in the structure of foreign policy making and decision making styles. Although the changes in foreign policy making were partly a result of the EU integration process, the way that the AK Party government welcomed, embraced, and encouraged these changes made the transformation easier and smoother.

Bringing Civilian Experts in

One of the central features of today's Turkish foreign policy making is the role that civilian experts play in planning, deliberating and conducting foreign policy. After long years of being considered as an elite business that needed to be run only by foreign policy bureaucracy and through standard operating procedures, in more recent years, civilian experts and scholars and think tanks have started to play a more active and involved role in foreign policy decision making.

According to the more statist traditional understanding, Turkish foreign policy was regarded as the business of ambassadors and a small number of politicians,

who barely allowed other experts to be involved in the process. The National Security Council was the most important body of foreign policy design in Turkey especially prior to the reform in its structure. Civilian experts in universities and think tanks largely remained outside the foreign policy formulation process. Many in conventional foreign policy circles considered foreign policy matters to be too intimate, important and critical to let “outsiders” participate. Historically, even the foreign ministers of Turkey turned out to be empty vessels carrying out the policy recommendations and programs of this bureaucracy. This continuity was regarded as the *modus operandi* of foreign policy, whereas change and reform was considered heretical. The monopoly of information possessed by bureaucrats and their privileged access the decision makers had created an inefficient, uni-dimensional and crisis-driven foreign policy decision making. Although strong political personalities took office in foreign ministry, including Ismail Cem and Mesut Yilmaz, their influence were mostly short-lived and there were no major changes in the way foreign policy was conducted.

With the AK Party's consolidation of its power, this rigid system and inflexible structure of foreign policy making started to be challenged from various dimensions. The first challenge came from civilian experts of foreign policy making. Unlike previous administrations, the AK Party government decided to break the monopoly of the civil and military bureaucracy and make use of the intellectual capital in academia and institutes by providing them access to decision making circles. These “non-state” civilian experts that include journalists, academics and independent researchers have tried to bring their own ideas and influence foreign policy making. This new way of conducting foreign policy has not only given an opportunity to these newcomers to challenge the conventional form of foreign policy making and contribute to the emergence of a new foreign policy but also helped them to test the relevance and tangibility of their opinions in foreign policy. Their opinions generated new debates and discussions, which increased the visibility of multiple viewpoints on critical foreign policy issues.

Ahmet Davutoglu, who was the foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Erdogan (and currently the Minister of Foreign Affairs) and one of the most notable of these experts outside the state establishment, almost singlehandedly built the new foreign policy parameters of Turkey.³⁷ Before becoming the advisor for the Prime Minister, he was the chairman of the Department of International Relations of Beykent University and was best known with his revisionist study, including “Stratejik Derinlik: Turkiye'nin Uluslarasi Konumu” (Strategic Depth: The International Position of Turkey), in which he examines the pre-Cold War

and post-Cold War international systems and analyzes a possible foreign policy positioning for Turkey that is based on both the heritage of the Ottoman Empire and the opportunities and responsibilities of geo-strategic location.³⁸ During his tenure, Davutoglu not only advised Turkish Prime Minister but also became an influential actor, a trusted mediator, a recognized expert, and an international figure in Middle East politics. Sarkozy's recent recognition of Davutoglu's efforts in the Middle East peace process is an example of his increasing visibility and impact in regional politics.³⁹ In a conference, Mark Parris of Brookings Institution described him as the "Henry Kissinger of Turkey."⁴⁰

The necessity to reform Turkish foreign policy has been an important aspect of Davutoglu's approach. Ahmet Davutoglu, in his interviews and articles, has constantly emphasized the need for change and his willingness to engage in a multi-dimensional strategy and a pro-active diplomacy. In one of his essays, Davutoglu underlined the significance of the diverse regional composition of Turkey, which affords Turkey the ability of maneuver in several regions simultaneously. For him "a central country with such an optimal geographic location cannot define itself in a defensive manner. It should be seen neither as a bridge country which only connects two points, nor a frontier country, nor indeed as an ordinary country, which sits at the edge of the Muslim world or the West"⁴¹

Davutoglu also underlines the main principles of this new foreign policy approach. According to him, these principles include: i) a balance between security and democracy; ii) zero problems policy towards Turkey's neighbors; iii) developing relations with neighboring regions and beyond; iv) a multi-dimensional foreign policy; and v) "rhythmic diplomacy."⁴²

Ahmet Davutoglu, with the cabinet change after the local elections of 2009, became the Foreign Minister of Turkey. In his first weeks in office, Davutoglu signaled the same form of activism and multi-dimensionality in his approach, by his constant visits to different capitals and his endeavors to mediate disputes. Now occupying the key position in foreign policy decision making, it is highly possible that Davutoglu will introduce new civilian experts to the policy making process and restructure the foreign ministry to welcome alternative ideas and strategies, constructed by increasing number of think tanks, institutions, and universities. Considering the possible changes in the Turkish policy making process, many analysts, scholars and journalists have already started to create circles in Ankara and Istanbul in order to play a more active role in Turkish foreign policy. These institutions play an important role in the "civil-ization" of foreign and security matters by challenging the monopoly of the military bureaucracy and retired gen-

erals in security matters and foreign policy bureaucracy and retired ambassadors in diplomatic and foreign policy matters. In addition they contribute to the rise of an increasingly attentive public to Turkey's foreign policy with their seminars, publications and increased media visibility.

Bringing the Public in

In addition to the rise of these elites, the Turkish public's interest and involvement to foreign policy related issues have also influenced foreign policy making in Turkey. As explained above, Turkish foreign policy had been seen as the business of the elite in Turkey for years. The foreign policy bureaucracy was mostly criticized for being distant from ordinary people and society. Also known as, "monshers", a derogatory term used to describe people at the foreign ministerial bureaucracy who are out of touch with the values and culture of Turkish people, the Turkish foreign policy bureaucracy was considered a class of their own. This closed door diplomacy and corporate culture of the foreign policy bureaucracy had also estranged foreign policy matters from the Turkish society. The only exceptions were when the leaders needed a rally point in order to distract the attention of the public from a domestic economic, political or social problem; and in some rare instances when it became unavoidable to inform the public because of a leak or constant pressure of the public through media or an opposition party. Other than these instances, the Turkish public had been left uninformed and foreign policy makers remained largely unaccountable.

In recent years, Turkish people's interest in foreign policy related issues increased rapidly. This was certainly partly a result of the communication revolution and a greater ease of organizing protests through the internet and online channels. But in the context of Turkey, it was also partly a result of the EU membership process, which granted new opportunities and new visions to the Turkish people regarding their rights and new venues to influence policy making processes.

The non-governmental organizations started to play a more active role in foreign policy making of Turkey. Some of these organizations, such as human rights NGOs, had already been active in influencing Turkey's relations with the Western world, however after the EU reforms and increasing attentiveness of the Turkish public to foreign policy related issues, these organizations started to shape Turkish foreign policy in a more assertive and organized manner. For example, during the discussions on the Annan Plan, civil society in Turkey followed different paths in order to influence foreign policy decision making. The international relations professors from the Turkish universities started a campaign in Turkey in support of

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the Plan, whereas the TUSIAD organized seminars and workshops in order to educate the public and prevent the misinformation about the Plan in Turkey.

Meanwhile, business associations, especially MUSIAD, TUSKON, TOBB, and TUSIAD have started to actively engage in foreign policy issues, published important foreign policy reports, released press statements, and integrated foreign policy into their own agenda. Some of these associations have become influential in certain foreign policy areas. According to Kemal Kirisci, “any attempt to explain the transformation of Turkey’s foreign policy on Cyprus without, for example, including the role of TUSIAD in mobilizing support for change to Turkey’s traditional ‘no solution is the solution’ policy as well as support for the Annan Plan would be an incomplete one.”⁴³ In addition, TUSIAD together with TOBB, MUSIAD, and IKV have also been influential actors in Turkey’s relations with the European Union.

The number and effectiveness of think-tanks have also risen in this period. These think-tanks, including ASAM, SETA, USAK, ODAM, and TUSAM have started to publish important reports and invite scholars from various fields of social sciences. Through these institutions, especially foreign policy scholars acquired a public space to share their opinions, make their criticisms, and express their recommendations to the government and inform the Turkish public about the foreign policy decisions of their government. The broadcasting networks and television channels have also contributed to this process by allocating an important part of their programs to debate shows on foreign policy matters, prepared and presented by university professors and researchers of these think tanks.

The arguments regarding de-Westernization of Turkey in terms of foreign policy was based on this emergence of a multiplicity of voices and an introduction of new actors with different viewpoints as compared to the foreign policy making circles. In fact, Turkey’s democratization and EU reform packages influenced foreign policy making in Turkey. They not only increased the rights and liberties of domestic public opinion but also affected the way that foreign policy is conducted in Turkey. Foreign policy, which had been left to the state establishment for long years, has become an important part of the agenda of civil society organizations. The AK Party government, over the years, has tried to adjust its foreign policy according to demands and reactions of these groups and became more inclusive in its handling of foreign policy.

Part of the ups and downs in Turkish relations with the US and the EU during the AK Party government was related to this increasing democratization of Turkish foreign policy. Unlike in many Western countries, the Turkish public continues to react to the American invasion of Iraq and the US policies in the Middle East. This is mainly owed to the insensitivities of the US administration to the red lines drawn by Turkish society and politics, including the PKK issue in Northern Iraq. In addition, the Turkish public was also disappointed with the unfulfilled promises of the EU regarding the issue of Cyprus and the discouraging statements by some of the leaders of the EU member states. Under these circumstances, the Turkish government felt the pressure of Turkish society as it reacted to the unfulfilled promises of the Western governments. Moreover, Erdogan's hard-line stance in his policy towards Israel during the Gaza incursion occurred because of the emergence of a societal reaction and pressure on foreign policy makers.

Unlike, foreign policy making in previous decades, which was conducted behind closed doors and with the leadership of the military and foreign policy bureaucracy, the new paradigm of foreign policy making, brought a more civil, transparent and participatory process

In fact, the more democratic and participatory structure of decision making created a new and a more complicated structure of foreign policy making. The criticisms of Paul Wolfowitz, then undersecretary of Defense of the United States, against the Turkish military for not showing their traditional leadership role in foreign policy during the March 1st crisis is a demonstration of the confusion in the minds of Western observers of Turkish politics.⁴⁴ Unlike, foreign policy making in previous decades, which was conducted behind closed doors and with the leadership of the military and foreign policy bureaucracy, the new paradigm of foreign policy making, brought a more civil, transparent and participatory process. Some of the observers apparently unaccustomed to the polyphony and diverse views in Turkish foreign policy making, interpreted the emergence of different voices and opinions as a sign of withdrawal from the Western world. However, reactions to both the EU and the US in recent years by the Turkish society were not a part of de-Westernization movement but a result of democratization of the foreign policy process in Turkey and vice versa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, several points need to be raised to explain the transformation of Turkish foreign policy in the last decade. First of all, to infer from these transfor-

mations that Turkey is turning away from the West rests on a zero-sum assumption of foreign policy making. In addition, this conventional binary opposition of either east or west in terms of foreign policy orientation cannot explain the current world and Turkey in it. Turkey, in this new era, is trying to create a new positive-sum understanding of foreign policy, by increasing interactions, trade and economic exchanges within its region, by trying to solve the problems with its neighbors, by diversifying its foreign policy options, and by pursuing an autonomous foreign policy after so many years of dependency on the West.

In fact, it is true that Turkish foreign policy has lived through a transformation in recent years. However, this transformation has more to do with the changes in the foreign policy decision making processes, diversification of issue areas, normalization of foreign policy perspectives, and democratization in Turkey than an ideological re-configuration, de-Westernization, or “Middle Easternization” of Turkish foreign policy. Turkish foreign policy today is more participatory and transparent than it used to be a decade ago. Moreover, Turkey’s democratization also influenced its foreign policy process and opened new venues for the public and civil society to influence decision making. Turkish foreign policy today is also more proactive and more multi-dimensional in terms of orientations, and more assertive regarding its own policy priorities. The AK Party government and its foreign policy team constantly emphasize their loyalty to the Western alliance and their firmness and determination to become an equal member of the EU. In addition, Turkey’s continuous contribution to NATO missions and increasing involvement in peace-keeping operations indicate the willingness of the AK Party government to take part in these security arrangements, albeit this time with political effectiveness as well as military input. These changes need to be taken into account in evaluating the foreign policy in Turkey.

The AK Party government also has important responsibilities regarding the formulation of this change in foreign policy making. In the international arena, Prime Minister Erdogan and foreign ministers have regularly attempted to respond to criticisms and concerns regarding Turkey’s goals and express their commitment not to de-Westernize Turkey and Turkish foreign policy; not to derail its commitment to the EU integration process; and not to end its alliance with the Western democracies. However, the AK Party government still needs to spend more energy and effort in order to prevent possible misunderstandings with its allies and demonstrate its commitment to international norms and principles. The controversies during and after Halid Meshal’s and Omer al-Bashir’s visits to Ankara proved the necessity of the AK Party leadership to strengthen communication

channels with its Western allies and international public. Through these communication routes, the AK Party leadership needs to explain its motivations and provide satisfactory and persuasive clarifications of its foreign policy making to avert misrepresentations in the Western world. In fact, public diplomacy needs to be strengthened in conjunction with other pillars of foreign policy making. It is the AK Party leadership's responsibility to explain and inform interested parties about its plans and projects, and respond to the criticisms and questions promptly in an appropriate matter. At a more practical level, it can also achieve this by demonstrating the same level of pro-activity and engagement in its relations with Western allies, especially when it comes to the European integration process. The AK Party leadership also needs to take into account the role that its foreign policy discourse can play in shaping public opinion in Turkey. To inform the public about certain foreign policy decisions and details of certain negotiations will prevent conspiracy theorists from shaping public opinion and it will also help to stop the claims regarding de-Westernization of Turkey and Turkish foreign policy during the AK Party government's tenure.

However, this transformation has more to do with the changes in the foreign policy decision making processes, diversification of issue areas, normalization of foreign policy perspectives, and democratization in Turkey than an ideological re-configuration of Turkish foreign policy

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