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# Constructing Turkish Foreign Policy: From the “Grand Strategy” to the “Strategic Depth”

Sinem Uca\*

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## Abstract

The Grand Strategy in the conventional Turkish foreign policy has been built on the defensive, secularism/security-based, pro-status quo and Western-oriented pillars while rejecting the Ottoman legacy since 1923. The Kemalist elite holding power in many institutions defined Turkey’s place strictly in the Western bloc in line with their identity, ideology, and quest to modernize and industrialise the country during the Cold War. However, from the 1980s onwards, several dynamics have opened new windows for change in both domestic and international politics including economic liberalisation, end of global bipolarity, new governmental initiatives abroad, de-securitization, democratization, and Europeanization. The JDP (Justice and Development Party) came to power in 2002, set a new orientation, goals, priorities, and tools for foreign policy within the guideline of the Strategic Depth Doctrine. An identity and ideology-driven, Middle Eastern-oriented, and pro-active foreign policy fuelling from the aspirations to utilize the Ottoman legacy to make Turkey a leading geopolitical actor in regional and global affairs was pursued until the collapse of the vision with the 2011 Arab Spring. In this article, firstly the characteristics of the conventional Turkish foreign policy and the factors that have constructed it, then the transition period, and finally the radical shift in JDP’s first decade will be critically assessed.

**Keywords:** Turkish Foreign Policy; Kemalism; Grand Strategy; Strategic Depth; Justice and Development Party

## Introduction

The Republic of Turkey was established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk from the roots of the Ottoman Empire in 1923. Yet it has always aimed at being a part of the Western civilization through rejecting the Ottoman legacy, focused on the West to catch up with the modernity and industrialisation not to repeat the mistakes of the ancestors which led to collapse. This strategy has constituted the very foundations of Kemalism which means following the ideas and principles of Atatürk. The Western orientation, emphasis on secularism, intentional ignorance of the Middle and Near East, and the will to preserve the status quo in the international system to protect the national security and territorial integrity have been the cornerstones of Turkish foreign policy outlined by the political elite who strongly followed Kemalist ideology roughly until the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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The beginning of neoliberal era since the 1970s and the end of bipolarity in 1991 has changed the international system entirely and produced a vacuum in which states needed to redefine their interests, security perceptions, alliances, strategies, relations, economics, and politics in general. This new window of the opportunities and obligations for adjustment in domestic and foreign affairs was welcomed by the neo-liberalisation of Turkish economy since the 1980s and new activism initiatives in the former Ottoman territories by several politicians but it was the Justice and Development Party (JDP) who could completely utilise it. The JDP was founded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan<sup>1</sup> in 2001 and has been ruling the country since 2002. The main topic of this article is the structural changes in Turkish Foreign Policy during the JDP's first ten years in the guideline of the Strategic Depth Doctrine developed by Ahmet Davutoğlu<sup>2</sup> who desired to make Turkey an influential geopolitical actor with its high democratic and economic standards in its geostrategic environment through activism built over the historical, political, cultural, and economic elements, in doing so, a vital power in global affairs. Applying Social Constructivism, it is argued that Turkish foreign policy has been converted from a fundamentally Kemalist, defensive, and Western-oriented approach into an assertive, pro-active, and the Middle Eastern-oriented strategy determined by the systemic, geopolitical, political, and economic factors but more dominantly the identity and ideology of the JDP elite. New figures in foreign decision-making and policymaking shared a Muslim identity and strong belief in the Ottoman legacy, multilateralism, zero problems with neighbours, and rhythmic diplomacy in international relations all of which had been decisive in shaping the choices, actions, and the results in that period. This article evaluates the main dynamics behind the change in Turkish foreign policy and to what extent this change constitutes a paradigm shift from the West to East and consistent, long-term strategy for the state.

The article begins with a survey of the characteristics of the conventional Turkish foreign policy and the factors that have constructed it. Ankara's pursuit of a Western-oriented and status quo-favoured approach in international relations is generally explained with the impacts of the ideology and identity of the state focusing on Kemalist hegemony, institutions affecting foreign policy, economic affairs, historical and cultural background, the geostrategic location of Turkey, and the structure of the international system. It is difficult to separate these factors but the fact that Kemalism has been the frame within which the meaning and response given to other elements including the specific structural conditions and geopolitical developments of the time is crucial for a comprehensive understanding. Similarly, the JDP's Islamist, ambitious, and neoliberal character has been the driving force completely altering the principles of the conventional Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, the ideational factors and role of agency were more profound in the policy implications.

There are many systemic factors derived from the end of the Cold War and the new world order behind the change creating a tendency to think in terms of geopolitics, security, and the national interests mainly with a state-centric Realist approach (Larrabee and Lesser 2003; Walker 2011). Some also argue that the JDP is behaving financially opportunist and nationalist in international politics rather than being simply Islamist (Pope 2010) as the economic interests are more in the foreground in shaping the foreign policy (Kirişçi 2009). However, these studies underestimate the new meanings assigned to Turkey's role, power, sources, geography, and history by the JDP. The governmental emphasis on the religious,

cultural, and historical links to revive the Ottoman memory to exert influence in the near regions had significant outcomes on Turkey's external relations. Muslim world dramatically gained more activity in diplomatic, economic, and political spheres in the process. As Turkey has always been promoted as a role model owing to its secular democracy for Muslim countries, this new pro-active foreign policy pursued by the JDP has created extensive speculation among politicians, journalists, and academicians worldwide about Turkey's direction. Definitions varied from pro-Arab (Raptopoulos 2004), 'Islamisation' (Çavdar 2006), 'Middle Easternization' (Oğuzlu 2008), a clear reflection of 'Neo-Ottomanism' (Taşpınar 2008) or to hegemonic attempt (Yalvaç 2012).

Herman identifies the foreign policy change in two types; tactical and strategic. The former involves the adjustment and programme change in which just the methods and instruments change while the policy framework and purposes remain the same. On the other hand, the latter covers the changes in the problems, goals, and international orientation, which constitute a more fundamental shift (Hermann 1990: 5-6). Some scholars argue that new Turkish foreign policy was a reply to changing international system in the post-Cold War era especially concerning the relations with the United States of America (USA) (Meral and Paris 2010: 84) and just a 'passing interest' since sometimes there had also been focus on the Middle East before JDP (Turan 2012). However, Öniş argues for 'a shift of axis' from the Western to Eastern pattern (Öniş 2010: 2), also called 'soft Euro-Asianism' (Öniş and Yılmaz 2009). As Turkish foreign policy has undergone an extensive change in terms of the character, purposes, orientation, priorities, programme, and instruments incrementally, which means a 'paradigm shift' (Sözen 2010) rather than a basic change in method or tools.

## **Theoretical Approach**

Foreign policy analysis has been mainly shaped around the structure-agency debate on whether the structural factors or the independent choices of actors are influential in state behaviours. Neorealism has been widely adopted to interpret the interactions among states, considering national interest as the key concept in foreign policy decision-making (Alden and Aran 2012: 2-3). Neorealists conceptualise all states as rational and unitary actors with fixed interests and a quest to maximize power to maintain their own security and survival within the constraints of the competitive, self-help, anarchic structure of the international system (Glaser 2010: 16-7). Similarly, Neoliberal Institutionalists also share this materialist, individualist, and rationalist approach with extra concentration on the international organizations and belief in cooperation. Both theories have enjoyed dominance until the 1980's when Social Constructivism developed (Barnett 2011: 150-1).

Social Constructivists begin the analysis on the idea that the structure and agency mutually construct each other, adding the neglected social dimension and change to discussion. In this theory, international system is perceived as a socially constructed reality evolved/evolving within specific historical, political, and cultural contexts through the social interactions of states rather than a static material arena that exists independently of human action and meaning. Moreover, as there are different ideational factors such as identities, ideologies, values, norms, and languages, neither the interests nor the identities of states are

fixed but are constructed in the social world, even the material facts exist due to the meanings assigned to them (Fierke 2010: 178-83). Hence, foreign policy is not solely shaped and/or directed by the security concerns, material interests, and power politics but the identity which create the interests, define the meaning given to the nature of relations, interactions, events, conflicts, preferences, and legitimate some courses of action over the others (Saideman 2002: 179).

Turkish foreign policy is one of the best illustrations of the latter as it has always been defined by the ideology and identity of the political elite which constructed and constrained how the politics is perceived in terms of enemy/friend and risk/opportunity. For instance, the possibility that Iran might build nuclear weapons is a national security threat to be prevented at any cost for Israeli politicians whereas Turkey despite the higher level of danger as sharing the border is one of the key international supporters of Iran against the sanctions or military intervention due to its nuclear programme. As Wendt puts it 'a gun in the hands of a friend is a different thing from one in the hands of an enemy, and enmity is a social, not material, relation' (1996: 50). In the social realm, the subjectivity of agents plays a profound role. At domestic level, same Iran used to be listed as an existential threat for secularism at home after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 by Kemalist elite and military but has been a close friend for the current government. Therefore, different meanings assigned to identity, culture, religion, history, security, geography, and national interests by Kemalist and JDP elite has been the crucial point behind the radical change in Turkish foreign policy next to the other structural developments.

## **1. Conventional Turkish Foreign Policy since 1923**

There were two basic and interrelated principles in the conventional Turkish foreign policy; first, the strict following the Western civilization based on liberalism and human rationality and second, the maintenance of the status quo in the international system (Oran 2014: 46-9). The Western-orientation was a product of Kemalist ideology and identity of the Establishment who has mainly dominated the formation and implementation of foreign policy with their preference to be a Western country included in the European order roughly until the end of the century. On the other hand, the defensive, against unsettling changes, and pro-status quo approach was embedded in the Westernisation of politics and society. These characteristics were a combined result of the Ottoman past, changing international structure, and geopolitical position of Turkey while how they were read by the agency was significant in shaping the choice and direction of policies. Thus, the key determinant, Kemalism, the fundamental transformation it created, and its hegemony in Turkish politics should be explained in detail.

### **1.1 Kemalist Politics at Home and Abroad**

Turkey has experienced a greater political, institutional, and social transformation with the reforms and principles adopted and promoted in the post-World War I period. A secular, national, and democratic republic was established step by step from the ruins of the Ottoman

Empire in the 1920s and 1930s through eliminating the Ottoman legacy by the founding cadre down to two reasons. Firstly, the collapse of the Empire was blamed on its heterogeneous socio-political structure which has made secessionist tendencies easier and more efficient. Secondly, the theocratic basis of the Ottoman authority was considered as the main factor behind the political, economic, and social decline as well as a symbol of backwardness and not progress (Fisher Onar 2009: 3-4). As a consequence, the relinquishment of the Ottoman past and ending the power of Islam in public and political domains have become the fundamental components of Kemalism, the main constituent of the new state and nation-building (Aras 2004: 18).

The formation of the nation-state based on the popular sovereignty of Turks instead of the multi-ethnic Islamic tradition of the Ottoman Empire ran together with the re-engineering of a Westernised society working with rationality. Many reforms were undertaken to construct an ideal modern nation in which the power of Islam as a source of legitimacy was gradually displaced. The caliphate which used to work as the supreme religious symbol of the Sunni world was abolished in 1924. This clearly meant a departure from the Muslim world (Fuller 2008: 26). In 1925 the usage of religious symbols such as beard, cassock, and headgear except for the religious officials were forbidden and Western style in public clothing was promoted. Also the dervish lodges and tombs were closed to limit the power of religious cults. The next year, a secular and Turkish language-based education system was established superseding the newly closed madrasahs. In 1928 Latin alphabet was adopted in place of Arabic script. In 1937 laicism was introduced as an indisputable principle of the Turkish Constitution which was largely structured using the European Laws displacing the previously used sharia law. Turkish army has been put in a privileged position as the guarantor of the secular republic and Westernised society (Dahiya 2011: 17) since the revolutionary cadre behind the reforms was also mostly coming from heroic military careers.

This specific ideational guideline upon which the state and society organised has been key determinant in also foreign policy while foreign policy decisions have reciprocally approved and strengthened Kemalism in return. Turkey has chosen to follow the Western path for the domestic modernization and consequently, its foreign policy has both mirrored and endorsed this choice and been shaped by it (Aras 2009: 31). Furthermore, the influence of Kemalism was not limited to his lifetime since his ideals have imbedded into the 'grand strategy' of foreign policy in this transformation process as the permanent state ideology and identity rather than a temporary governmental one (Robins 2003: 69). For example, Turkey was the first Muslim country which recognised Israel in 1949 prompting anger from the Arab world while enhancing the Western alignment (Hale 2013: 92). Similarly, Turkey tried to convince and incite the newly independent countries of the Third World at 1955 Bandung Conference to ally with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and Western Bloc rather than being a part of the Non-Alignment Movement even though it also shared the experience of an anti-imperialist war against the European powers. This stance deteriorated its image into being the pawn of the Western world (Balcı 2015: 94-5). Yet the priority of being a part of the West triumphed over all other attributes.

The state ideology was strictly followed by the political elite, experts, and bureaucrats with whom foreign policymaking levels in the official institutions were ineradicably filled on purpose. Their assigned role in foreign policymaking has been legitimized by the

constitutional and legal framework such as the crucial role of military in National Security Council (Özcan 2008: 86-7). Through this way, the army as the legitimate guarantor of Kemalism intervened in the political arena when it saw a deterioration or defection from the state ideology as in the military coups of 1960, 1971, 1980, the postmodern coup of 1997, and e-coup of 2007. For example, religious fundamentalism and irredentism have been officially listed as the most crucial threats clearly linked to Iran and Syria in the National Security Policy Document (Red Book) of 1995 (Altunışık and Martin 2011: 571), which was followed by the removal of the political Islamist Necmettin Erbakan from the government in 28 February 1997.

As a result, Turkish foreign policy has been primarily determined and conducted with a special focus on national security issues by Kemalist elite in cooperation with the army while other groups who did not share the official vision were largely disregarded. This situation has created a dilemma between the Western-oriented ruling class and general public mainly affiliated to the Islamic culture of the Middle East (Aydın 2003: 326). Therefore, it has been criticised that the political approach of state which ignored the past and broke with the cultural connections of society lacked the historical depth, was unable to understand the real Turkish identity while focusing on a given European one, and caused the isolation from the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa (Cem 2004: 11 & 30). This perspective later would have been also a component of the Strategic Depth Doctrine.

## **1.2 Historical Factors**

To start with, the historical period leading to the downfall of the Ottoman Empire involved many humiliating experiences which have provoked the fundamental desire to reject its heritage, tendency of isolation from the world issues, and general scepticism. Being fallen behind of the competition for the New World and scientific developments of the Enlightenment Age, the Ottomans incrementally lost their global significance and power in military, trade, and world geo-culture. Its last centuries witnessed the inability of the authorities to hold the empire together as the most of the lands were lost due to consecutive wars. Military defeats have let to Tsar Nicholas I of Russia defining the Ottoman Empire as the ‘sick man of Europe’ in 1853 while even asking the British counterpart to partition it. Besides, the country has also become economically dependent from 1854 onwards. The Public Debt Service through which the Western powers gained all financial control was established in 1881 (Aydın 2003: 313-4). These political, military, and economic setbacks of last decades have left deep psychological scars in society and political elite, which paved the way to the perception that joining the ‘Western club’ was a must to escape from the bad fate of the predecessor (Aydın 1999: 163). A Western-oriented foreign policy in the republican era was an outcome.

On the other hand, although a strong pro-Western approach was adopted in the construction of a secular nation-state as in the European models by the founding fathers, there were still widespread scepticism, concerns, and fears towards the West especially in terms of foreign involvement in domestic affairs and territorial integrity. This attitude had its roots in the Treaty of Sèvres signed by the defeated Ottoman authorities and victorious Allies in the end of World War I to dismantle, invade, and colonize the country. This trauma is called

‘Sèvres syndrome’ and derives from the mistrust to the West (Fisher Onar 2009: 4). The aims of the treaty were prevented by four years-long Independence War and the subsequent establishment of the independent republic but the effects of trauma have kept alive among the Turkish political elite and public.

The fear and distrust that Turkey is surrounded by enemies who have specific interests in undermining its national unity have played an important role in shaping foreign policy in a nationalist way focused on security, sovereignty, and territorial, also functioned to enhance the role and prestige of army. The discourse of insecurity and national survival was also reinforced by the media and textbooks in which the thought that ‘Turks have no friends but other Turks’ has been infused to students since 1930s so that the nation could be aware of the internal and external threats and defend their country when necessary (Lundgren 2007: 37). Thus, the public support was mobilised for the military power and nationalist foreign policy to protect the homeland against all kinds of enemies (Aras 2009: 32). Turkey has taken shelter in the preservation of the status quo by which it was believed that the country would have been secured most. ‘Peace at home, peace in the world’ principle of Atatürk has become the motto of this policy legitimising isolationism and nationalist stance in foreign realm (Murinson 2007: 946). This meant a defensive position in international relations and a clear-cut from the former Ottoman heritages in the Middle East, North Africa, Balkans and also Turkic Central Asia under the control of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to reduce possible problems.

### **1.3 Systemic Factors**

After 1923 Turkey has pursued neutrality in favour of the existing status quo in foreign relations and managed to keep out of World War II. However, the evolving bipolarity has pushed the ruling elite to support a more pro-Western approach in terms of national security. The war against the Nazi Germany has been symbolically declared in the last days of the active war to be able to join the United Nations (UN) meanwhile the steps of democratization in Turkish political life through the transition to a multi-party system in 1950 signalled an adaptation to the UN system. The preferences clearly reflected ‘the conscious decision to side with the West’ (Aras 2009: 31) in answering to Cold War.

The hostility of the USSR under Stalin against Turkey has been accepted as one of the most crucial driving forces behind the formulation of a pro-Western foreign policy. The threat perception for the security and territorial integrity of homeland was prompted by Stalin’s claim of Turkish provinces Kars and Ardahan, the unilateral abrogation of the 1925 Turkish-Soviet Friendship Pact in 1945, desire to gain a voice over the control of the straits and use of Turkish soils to establish Soviet bases (Larrabee and Lesser 2003: 112). Turkey’s strategic environment has also changed since the Russian power extended to the Transcaucasia in the east, Bulgarian frontier in the west while the Greek Civil War of 1949 had the risk of communist takeover. These developments pushed Turkey to abandon neutrality and ‘uninvolved dependence on the balance of power’ and decide to join NATO in 1952 (Hale 2013: 87). Ankara looking for protection under NATO umbrella assumed a defensive role in the region as a barrier to Soviet expansionism in exchange for Marshall Aid, NATO membership, bases, and training. Consequently, it became a part of and dependent on



the Western bloc for security and economic needs (Turan 2012: 66). A gradually one-dimensional foreign policy was shaped within this security-based strategy with little manoeuvre capacity.

However, it could be argued that the ideological alignment of Kemalist elite with the West has made it easy to choose sides in the Cold War since there was not any everlasting aggression from the USSR towards Turkey. The USSR actually had previously been the main supporter of Turkish Independence War against the Allies through diplomatic, financial, and armament aids, which continued in the republican era in collaborative industrialisation plans. In view of that, the foremost ideology and identity of state as the guideline for the grand strategy has been seminal in evaluating and responding to the changing structure of international system. Turkish foreign policy has been adjusted to the interests of the Western alliance as being a part of Europe and approved as a European state have long been the principal aims of Kemalism. In this regard, Turkey applied for the membership to the European Economic Community in 1959 and for full membership to the European Union (EU) in 1989. Although the ruling parties have changed so often due to the collapsing coalitions, Kemalist vision has generally sustained. In 1945-1989 Ankara has been pro-Western and pro-European while in 1989-2002 a limited activism added to foreign policy in the turbulence of shifting power balances in the world but the grand strategy has been still followed until the JDP government (Müftüler Baç 2011: 285). Therefore, it is not the only structure and security but also the ideals to direct and construct Turkish nation as a modern, Western civilization played a key role in foreign policy. This was to change when the identification and vision of the ruling elites changed into a Ottoman-historical and Islamist-cultural focused one as well as the structure itself became flexible and multilateral after the fall of communism.

#### **1.4 Geopolitical Factors**

Turkey stands in one of the most important geostrategic locations in the world as a bridge and energy corridor between the East and West, a cornerstone among the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, and finally a fortress connecting Europe with the Middle East. It is covered by the seas on three sides while controlling the only seaway – the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles – between the Caucasus and Mediterranean regions and also close to the important resources of the Middle East. This unique position makes Turkey both a Mediterranean, European, Balkan, Caucasian, and Middle Eastern country. Therefore, it is a significant case where geopolitics is decisive in foreign relations. Ankara has a natural chance to play a bigger role than its capability in terms of size, population, economic and infrastructural development, military power it could have assumed in another location (Ayдын 2003: 315). However, the same chances make it more vulnerable in security, social, political, and economic aspects than any other country to the developments in the surrounding area. Since Turkey's environment has always been a conflict zone open to proxy games of several foreign and domestic actors, Ankara showed a tendency to be against any dramatic changes in the region which could cause danger for homeland.

Turkish foreign policymakers have always clearly bounded by the geopolitics, but their specific perception and interpretation of Turkey's geography, meaning given to its

neighbourhood have been rather relevant in practice. For instance, Kemalist elite perceived the Middle East as a backward area and security threat that could destabilise the country and reduce the pace of modernization. As a result, they preferred not to involve in the Middle Eastern affairs and followed an isolationist and defensive foreign policy to maintain the status quo in the region on behalf of its own security whereas the JDP elite has been keen on being an important actor in this environment. Similarly, Central Asia was ignored by the isolationist approach rejecting the pan-Turkist movements for the political unification of all Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia and Caucasus whereas Turgut Özal<sup>3</sup> saw the cultural and ethnic connections as an advantage to form an active foreign policy in Eurasia after the collapse of the USSR (Murinson 2007: 946-7). Accordingly, the geopolitics is not a fixed object but rather a socially constructed reality with meanings assigned to it and in the case of Turkey, its impacts on foreign policy depended on the ideology and identity of the rulers.

## **2. The Dynamics of Change**

Turkish foreign policy has given the signals of change since 1980s due to the economic liberalisation, end of Cold War, changing perceptions and conditions of security, democratisation, and relations with the EU, which should be best evaluated through the agent-structure relations. Both the basis of JDP's coming into power and the radical shift in foreign policy had their basis lied in this period.

### **2.1. Economic Liberalisation since the 1980s**

In the 1980s Turkish economy has gone through an extensive restructuring with neoliberal reforms put into practice to follow the New Right direction. The gradual economic liberalization process opened Turkey to the global marketplace and promoted economic growth. In parallel, the society has also transformed with the mass urbanization, development of a new, conservative but entrepreneurial middle class (Bechev 2011: 174). The transformation of the services sector, especially retail has paved the way for a new urban life and consumption culture. The industrial activity began proliferation in the emerging new centres named Anatolian tigers like Denizli, Kayseri, Konya, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş (Sak 2011). The export-led growth strategy diversified Turkish exports and increased the need of new markets for the growing Turkish businesses which seemed to be more comfortable doing business with Muslim countries as being religiously conservative (Altunışık and Martin 2011: 579). However, the conditions for a breakthrough change in foreign policy were not sufficient as the ethno-secessionist armed insurgency by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) after 1984 made the security the first issue, the Western-oriented state ideology was highly dominant, neoliberal model and Turkey's integration to the world economy have been interrupted by several economic crises in 1994, 2000, and 2001. Nevertheless, this process harboured the very dynamics for the JDP to come to power in an early election in 3 November 2002 by 34% of votes despite being a new organisation.

## **2.2. The End of Cold War: ‘New Ottomanism’**

Even though Turkey has always been a significant ally in the West, the end of Cold War led to a different framework of new independent states in the former Eastern Bloc and the Soviet territories, several wars, complex conflicts. This structural break opened a way for transformation in Turkish foreign policy through creating new approaches, understandings, opportunities, connections, risks, and threats. Turkey’s strategic environment has completely changed and plunged into chaos such as Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and Caucasus in this period, altering the parameters for alliances and security interests. Since the increasing instability and tensions in its neighbourhood area directly influenced the stability and prosperity at home, it was now no longer Greece or the USSR but developments in the Middle East generally; Syria and Iraq in particular meant the security threat for Turkey (Oğuzlu 2008: 5). Ankara needed to revise old alliances to combat new security challenges and seek stability in its neighbourhood to maintain its own security as well as exploit the opportunities both politically through being interventionist, activist, negotiator, peacemaker and economically as new markets and infrastructure needs arise (Meral and Paris 2010: 79-80). Turkish foreign policy began to show a new activism and rotation towards south and east in an adaptation and reply to the new international structure and changing geopolitical environment to make the best of it economically, politically, strategically.

Özal’s term was the first signs of change as neoliberal leader thinking ‘out of the box’, he tried to launch close linkages with the Central Asia, expand trade and investment in the Middle East, and involve in the First Gulf Crisis (Altunışık 2009: 179). The concentration on the Middle East increased when Erbakan’s Welfare Party gained power in the coalition government in 1997 (Altunışık and Martin, 2011: 570-71). The opening to previously neglected areas was followed by Foreign Minister İsmail Cem (1997-2002) to improve the political and economic relations with neighbours. This period of change is generally called ‘New Ottomanism’ but it could not be fully cultivated until the JDP government (Yalvaç 2012: 167). These initiatives kept being unsystematic as Turkish political life during the 1990’s was characterised by short term unstable coalition governments without a clear strategy challenging the grand one.

## **2.3. 1999: A Turning Point**

Turkish political life has come through de-securitization in turning to millennium, which transformed the parameters in Turkey’s domestic and foreign politics. In 1999, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured in Kenya and brought home for terrorism trials. Shortly afterwards, his declaration of unilateral ceasefire was followed with the expulsion of armed militia to the north of Iraq. Therefore, as the public finally started enjoying peace and stability after years of bloody conflict at home and tensions with neighbours used to support PKK activities such as Greece and Syria, Turkish policymakers also began to speak of normalization and a ‘zone of peace’ in the surrounding region (Taşpınar 2008: 17). Once the main security threat was under control, it became finally possible to normalise and seek solutions to many other issues such as water and border disputes with Syria, water and Kurdish questions with Iraq, the Aegean issue with Greece, and the partition of Cyprus.

Many domestic policy areas such as the constitution, militarism, human rights also gained new focus.

In the end of the same year, Turkey's European policy gained a momentum as being granted the candidate status to the EU in Helsinki Summit, fulfilling the Establishment's historical, insistent aims of membership despite the process being always challenging, slow, and easy to be interrupted by many factors. The left-wing coalition passed remarkable reforms including the end of death penalty, enactment of the international human rights legislation, improvements in women's rights and prison conditions, decreasing the power of Turkish military in the NSC, expanding freedom of expression and religion, and removal of restrictions on civil society and media in 1999-2002 (Pope 2010: 162). These were a preparation for the EU accession negotiations to start in 2005 and enhanced both democratisation and economic development since foreign capital and direct investments started pouring on the path to liberal democracy. In other words, the JDP took control when the country had already been put into the right direction and had the convenient circumstances and clear vision to develop and apply a new foreign policy strategy.

### **3. The JDP: A Challenge to Kemalist Hegemony**

The JDP joined Turkish political life in 2001 in an attempt to benefit from the impacts of the financial crisis and identity gap between the traditional society and mainstream politics. Its founding fathers shared *Milli Görüş* (National Vision) background as the former 'students' and workfellows of Erbakan. However, they split from his party as the reformist wing, formed JDP in order to retreat from radical Islamism and join under a moderate umbrella (Fuller 2008: 50). Thus, the new party appealed to the 'centre of political spectrum' promising democratization, more individual liberties, welfare for the bottom, and free market economy, succeeded subsequent election wins and formed majority governments since 2002 (Sözen 2010: 110-11). After the turbulence of 1990s, the single-party rule made it easy to make changes and maintain order. Yet, it still was very challenging for a party of political Islamist roots to operate in a strictly Kemalism-oriented state with essential importance given to secularism (Robins 2007: 289). Pro-Kemalist bureaucracy in many institutional segments have been dominant in political life and foreign policymaking since 1923 while Islamists have been excluded from the political arena by either judicial closure of parties or military interventions. In other words, the elected governments have been strictly controlled, giving them little or no room for policy formation out of the official ideological borders. This structure has gradually loosened by the economic growth and Europeanization of politics during the membership process.

The JDP easily implemented necessary economic and regulatory reforms by contrast to former fragile coalitions. Under fiscal and monetary discipline, the inflation re-decreased to single-digit percentages and high rates of economic growth were generated (Öniş and Yılmaz 2009: 8). While the government was internationally praised by economic miracles, the supporting EU-led democratization reforms also continued in 2003 by new packages which reduced the function of the NSC to an advisory body as it now could meet once in every two months instead of once-a-month, number of its civilian members was increased and

requirement of the NSC secretary to be a military officer was removed. Therefore, it became harder for military to put pressure on the civilian government to conduct pro-Kemalist policies as usual through the NSC (Larrabee 2010: 160-61). As a result of these legal changes, the role of military in politics diminished, new actors such as the NGOs, non-bureaucratic agents, and advisors got more involved (Özcan 2008: 99-100). The EU accession reforms adopted to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria were in fact very transformative in the judiciary and civil-military relations on behalf of the JDP government.

Nevertheless, the army made a website intervention warning of Islamist incursions against secularism during the presidential election of Abdullah Gül in the parliament, branded as ‘e-coup’ of 2007 by critics (Villelabeitia 2009). Also the Constitutional Court still punished the party for an administrative fine as it has become ‘the focal point of activities against the principle of secularism’ in a closure case of 2008 (Arslan 2017). Holding the majority vote at the Parliament, the JDP amended several articles in the Constitution as a self-safeguard to obstruct the party closures and dismissal of deputies, make the military generals triable while also appointing conservative officials in many institutions including the army, judiciary, and ministries to change the balances (Cumhuriyet 2010). Additionally, the five years-long Ergenekon trial provided results on 5 August 2013 sentencing several high-ranking military officers, politicians, lawyers, journalists, and writers for plotting to overthrow the government (BBC 2013). Consequently, the JDP gained leverage over Kemalist elite, secured its position in power, and expanded its power as the key actor in politics. The relative success at home provided the JDP the necessary legitimacy and ability to abandon the conventional foreign policy and pursue an active one abroad, copying the soft power tools of the EU such as diplomacy and economic initiatives and posing as a role model for the developing world, particularly the Middle East.

### **3.1. New Turkish Foreign Policy**

The JDP has determined a new set of principles, vision, and path for foreign policy built on the Strategic Depth Doctrine which worked roughly until 2010 when the Arab Spring movements broke. In this time period having the roots back in the last decades, Turkish foreign policy was dramatically changed by the political agent from strictly pursuing the grand strategy into a new, pro-active, diversified version with an apparent the Middle East orientation. Surely the JDP’s characteristics as ‘a conservative Muslim party’ sharing ‘a different worldview’ than former governments have been crucial in choices (Habibi and Walker 2011: 1). The JDP elite interpreted of and responded to the conjunctural and structural developments in the country and world via their Muslim identity and neoliberal-conservative ideological background, which explains the shift to the East as a part of exploiting the Ottoman nostalgia for more power and influence. Despite being beneficial on improving the economic, political, and cultural ties with many countries initially, yet this quest and ambition for a new regional and global role for Turkey carried its own risks and challenges including the disassociation from the West, insecurity and vulnerability to the unforeseen developments like Arab Spring and civil wars in close environment.

### 3.2. Strategic Depth Doctrine

Davutoğlu has been the intellectual architect of the new Turkish foreign policy with the cornerstone of the Strategic Depth Doctrine as first the advisor and then foreign minister. He argues that a nation's value in the world depends on the geo-cultural, geopolitical, and geo-economic parameters. These could be understood in the light of the historical depth connecting the past-conjuncture-future and geopolitical depth managing the transitivity between the domestic-regional-international in an intersectional way (Davutoğlu 2001: 552). Geopolitically, Turkey is surely suitable to play a significant role as a 'specific central country' on an optimal place in the middle of the Afro-Eurasia landmass. Historically, Turkey's Ottoman past and connections with the Ottoman heritage including the Balkans, Middle East, Caucasus, Black Sea, Mediterranean, Caspian, and Gulf make it an 'umbrella' for diverse cultural elements and identities, which make its geostrategic position more profound. Due to this specific geography and history, it cannot be simply considered either an ordinary central/bridge country or a frontier. Ankara should assume a 'constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs' not just for itself (Davutoğlu 2008: 77-9). However, it has conversely pursued a defensive stance as being unsuccessful in constructing a consistent theory for the strategic and tactical steps in foreign policy, which could adapt to the changing conditions and realities as well as involve the geographical, historical, and cultural assets of the nation, consequently, had a limited freedom of action caused by the lack of the political will, strategic vision, and planning.

There have always been diverse, easily changing approaches to the constant elements like population, culture, history, and geography and the potential ones like economic, technological, energy, and military capacities among the political elite, bureaucracy, and public. For example, history and culture parameters were trapped in a limited, static frame by the ideological preferences, while geography parameter by the geopolitical pre-acceptances of the Cold War. This situation should be changed by the formation of a new foreign policy suitable to the international conjuncture through a dynamic reinterpretation of Turkey's constant and potential elements in depth (Davutoğlu 2001: 45-8). The important point here is that while Davutoğlu follows a Realist and state-centric framework, his vision still depends on a Constructivist understanding and reinterpretation of the role and meaning given to Turkey in the world in terms of Strategic Depth (Yalvaç 2012: 168). His Muslim, conservative, and neoliberal character which is proud of the Ottoman legacy, sympathetic to multiculturalism, and ambitious about the country's expansion of power and spheres of influence in the neoliberal globalisation era was decisive on how to perceive the policy, strategy, and capabilities in the first place.

The five principles for Turkey's new foreign policy Davutoğlu proposes are first a 'balance between security and democracy' to be a legitimate model for the environs, secondly 'zero problem policy' towards the neighbours, third to 'develop relations with the neighbouring regions and beyond', fourth 'adherence to multi-dimensional foreign policy' in a complementary -not competitive- way to be more independent, and finally fifth 'rhythmic diplomacy' which meant more involvement in global affairs (Davutoğlu 2008: 79-82). This draws a departure from the one-dimensional pro-Western foreign policy which according to Davutoğlu broadly cut Turkey's strategic options, led to the failure to implement an

independent foreign policy, limited its ability to become a major actor, and damaged its image (Fuller 2008: 170). Hence, Ankara should counterweight its ties to the West by building new multiple alliances so that it would gain independence and leverage (Walker 2007: 34). The diversification of foreign policy orientation is to be realised by a more proactive engagement with other parts of the world but specifically the Middle East on the basis of historical, cultural, and religious ties. Therefore, change has become the vital concept in JDP's foreign policy aiming at the improvement of the relations with the Middle East from which Turkey had been intentionally alienated by Kemalist elite due to the prioritisation of the Westernization of the country (Altunışık and Martin 2011: 577). New strategy was a clear break from the conventional defensive, Western-oriented, isolationist, and security-based foreign policy and constituted a fundamental shift as the goals, dimensions, and orientation have dramatically changed.

### **3.3. Foreign Policy Implications**

Davutoğlu's proposed path would have transformed Turkey from being a 'wing' country to a 'pivotal' state and finally a global actor in the international arena (Yalvaç 2012: 168). Guided by this vision, the JDP's first ten years have been characterised by the emphasis on building good relations with neighbours, use of soft power, and a strong ambition about the role of Turkey as an active regional and global power (Öniş 2010: 5). A broadening multilateralism, increased use of economic and diplomatic tools, and higher activity in international organizations were clearly seen in Ankara's international politics. Firstly, Turkey now copied the soft power tools of the EU such as diplomacy, dialogue, negotiation, and economic interdependency as the main way for solving problems and fulfilling national interests instead of using force as in the cases of military operation to Cyprus in 1974 and ultimatum to Syria to expel Öcalan and close the PKK camps in 1998. This constituted an important shift from the conventional militarist style not only in foreign policy but also at the domestic level through the democratic opening processes on ethnic Kurdish and sectarian Alawite minorities to improve their socio-political rights initiated in 2009 yet being cancelled later.

Secondly, Turkish foreign policy has become very active. Turkey became a member of G20 in 2003, negotiated with sectarian groups in Iraq, developed the Alliance of Civilizations to enhance worldwide intercultural dialogue in 2004, commanded NATO force in Afghanistan three times since 2004, participated in the UN force in Lebanon in 2006, mediated the negotiations of the USA-Iran and Syria-Israel, was elected as a member of the rotating UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2009-2011, participated in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 2004, lobbied for economic liberalization in the Middle East, and hosted many important summits such as the World Economic Forum in 2006, African Summit in 2008, IMF/World Bank, Alliance of Civilisations and OIC in 2009 (Müftüler Baç 2011: 282-3). Turkey's mediator role has continued by 'Bosnia-Herzegovina-Serbia-Turkey trilateral dialogue mechanism' in Balkans to find peaceful solutions for problems and the 'Iraqi Neighbouring Platform', consisted of all neighbours of Iraq to collectively control the crisis situation after the US-led war (Davutoğlu 2013: 86). Activism was most assertive in economics as the JDP continued to implement all necessary policies to increase foreign trade such as building bilateral relations with the previously ignored countries in the Middle East,

Africa, Latin America, and Asia as the rising Turkish entrepreneurship looked for new markets more than any other time in its history. Key business interest groups such as Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSIAD), Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MÜSIAD), and Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) have been increasingly able to access the government, influence public opinion and foreign policy, and connect with their counterparts in other countries. These lobbying activities aimed to gain support of policies 'typically associated with a trading state' (Kirişçi 2009: 46-7). In collaboration with this incentive, Turkey's international activity increased tremendously in recent years but the identity-related construction behind should be emphasised.

For example, the official visits altogether and to specifically Arab regions intensified as the Middle East has become the top destination for Prime Minister Erdoğan (31.47%) in 2003-2011, second for Abdullah Gül (24.56%) in foreign ministry (2003-2007) and first (17%) in the following four years into presidency. Besides, the most of the visits to the West were mainly to attend an international organization meeting while Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan constituted mostly official bilateral state visits accompanying businessmen (Habibi and Walker 2011: 5). This preference is vitally important to understand the impact of nonmaterial aspects such as religion, culture, historical roots, and Ottoman legacy on the economic interests represented by the rising conservative, devout Muslim, rural Anatolian businesses who were more prone to further expansion into the emerging Middle Eastern markets and regional dynamism on the contrary to the tendency of the 'traditional metropolitan Aegean businesses' towards the European markets (Walker 2011: 8). As a result, between 2003-2010 the EU's share in Turkey's foreign trade has declined from 53.63% to less than 41.6% despite still being the biggest trade partner (Öniş 2010: 13). Meanwhile, the share of Muslim neighbourhood area consisted of the Arab world, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) in Turkey's total exports enjoyed a sharp increase from 9% to 26% in 2002-2009 (Habibi and Walker 2011: 3). Thus, the unifying Islamic values were instrumental in the direction of foreign economic relations.

Thirdly, there has been a clear improvement in the relations with neighbours in 2002-2011. The new meaning given to Turkey's geography by Davutoğlu based on the historical depth linking the domestic security to the regional has become the basis of the new 'zero problems' policy framework and strategy in neighbouring nations (Aras and Fidan 2009: 197). Relations with Bulgaria, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia after the collapse of Cold War were already in positive direction. There has been significant normalization with Greece, Iraq, Iran, and Syria through de-securitization, trade, and investment, while also several initiatives, negotiations, and rapprochements were held to improve the relations with Cyprus in 2004 through the UN channel and Armenia in 2009 with bilateral protocols (Sözen 2010: 115-6). However, it should be noted that the JDP apparently had more interest in better relations with Muslim neighbours than Cyprus, Greece or Armenia. Although Cyprus issue seemed to be the fundamental blockage in front of Turkey's membership to the EU, there have not been any noteworthy solution attempts after the rejection of Annan Plan in 2004 referendum by the Greek part of the island. Likewise, the rapprochement process with Armenia could not proceed as the parliaments in both countries have not even tried to ratify



the protocols yet. Because, the opening borders with Armenia before the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was solved would have caused deterioration in relations with Azerbaijan of the same Turkic kin and religion (Migdalovitz 2010/11: 42). The roots of selectivity in the JDP's conduct of foreign policy laid mostly in the ideational factors rather than simple geopolitical or strategic calculations.

For instance, the accession talks with the EU which displayed the JDP as liberal democrat in the first place have been de facto stalled since 2005 and the government evidently seemed reluctant to take a step to push significant reforms required by the EU such as the reopening of Halki Seminary for the rights of Christian minorities and abolishment of Article 301 to strengthen the freedom of expression (Öniş and Yılmaz, 2009: 15). The course of action and preferences of the JDP as well as several European countries on the basis of different ideology, identity, perception of democracy, and governance style were consequential in the worsening membership process. On the other hand, Turkey's becoming an observer in the Arab League and an active player in OIC since 2004 just a short time after JDP's coming into power could not be a coincidence unrelated to the government's Islamic vision (Cağaptay 2007: 2). Furthermore, the Sudanese President Omar al Bashir's visit in August 2008 was welcomed by the government, even though the International Criminal Court indicted him for genocide while Erdoğan declared that he did not believe that a Muslim could do such a thing (Migdalovitz 2010/11: 41).

Other instances were Erdoğan's explicit support for HAMAS, condemnation of Israel in any international platform for the blockage of Gaza, and storming off from January 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos after a dispute with the Israeli President Shimon Peres over 2008/9 Gaza War (Öniş 2010: 6). Following this event, Turkey made the situations in Gaza, Afghanistan, and Pakistan the top priority of the UNSC during its presidency in June 2009 risking of more isolation from the Western allies (Müftüler Baç 2011: 283). The tension reached the highest level when Israeli army attacked Mavi Marmara flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza in international waters and killed nine people of whom eight were Turkish citizens in 2010 (Turan 2012: 76-7). These developments gained Erdoğan an international prestige, especially in Arab countries with his Muslim solidarity appeal (Migdalovitz 2010/11: 41). Despite its devastating impacts in strategically crucial Israel-USA-Turkey relations, his pragmatist personality and ideological background outweighed the material interests in shaping the course of actions at the state level.

Similarly, Iran and Syria policies were also reshaped by cultural and religious ties. The government accelerated bilateral relations with two neighbours even though they were listed as the 'axis of evil' by the USA in 2002. Counter to the international pressure for the isolation of Syrian regime due to its occupation of Lebanon since 1976 and so-called involvement in the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 (Robins 2007: 296), the JDP accelerated the engagements with Syria by signing several agreements related to tourism, duty-free trade, and educational exchange in 2003 and then a joint-declaration of recognition of the current borders, which ended the territorial issues lasting since 1920's (Murinson 2007: 955-6). The government also hesitated to criticize Iran's nuclear programme while ignoring the security concerns of the West, launched an initiative with Brazil and Iran to sign a nuclear swap deal for a peaceful solution, showed a strong support for the neighbour at international level such as its ineffective veto on further sanctions in 2010 UNSC

(Altunışık 2013: 167). This was a clear case when Turkey acted independently and even against the interests of the Western allies. Finally, Bulgaria, Greece, Syria, Georgia, and Armenia were removed, whereas the former strategic partner Israel was first time listed as a severe external threat to national security in 2010 Redbook. Iran and religious fundamentalism also were no longer considered as major threats (TÜSIAD 2010: 1). These attitudes had degraded the relations with the USA, the EU, and Israel and aroused questions on Turkey's commitment to the West as the new foreign policy obviously showed the Middle Easternization and signs of disassociation from the West.

## **Conclusion**

The new Turkish foreign policy implemented in the first decade of millennium was driven by interactional dynamics between a specific agent and structural parameters of neoliberal globalisation and post-Cold War era in both national and international arenas. It was defined around neither a pro-Western pillar nor a dependent/defensive character as the Kemalist grand strategy had previously settled. The JDP set an assertive, pro-active, Middle Eastern-oriented, and neoliberal agenda for Turkey using the Strategic Depth formula to turn it into a major player in regional and global affairs. There were diverse incentives behind such as economy, interest groups, security, power, culture, identity, and ideology but all filtered by the Islamist, Neo-Ottomanist, ambitious, and pragmatist outlook of the JDP elite. Many aspects of the new strategy caused criticism about the implications, orientation, aims, style, and outcomes.

Firstly, defining a new axis apart from the West has disassociated Turkey from the roots which had made it democratic, secular, and modern in the first place. It was these European standards, qualities, norms, and values supplying Turkey a role model for other countries in their own modernization and progress. Losing the route towards and the will to the EU has negatively influenced Turkey's democracy, created disadvantage in its soft power capabilities, and in return limited its attractiveness. Secondly, the proposed principles of multi-dimension and zero problems with neighbours have been applied selectively on the basis of culture and religion, which created one-dimension on the Middle-East and temporal better relations with only Muslim neighbours. A practice to be a leading power should have included more variables and rational driving forces to maintain the diversity and freedom of action and choice. Otherwise, changing circumstances and unpredicted developments could have any time made it vulnerable and/or inefficient as in the case of the Arab Spring which started in Tunisia, 2010 and spread into grassroots movements for democratization against the autocratic regimes in many countries including Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Algeria. The JDP's ten years of building better relations with the Arab world came to a downfall as it now began assuming an active interfering role instead of an indirect model in the region as the ambitions reached a peak in the form of the 'hegemonic depth'. This risky policy style has been creating more danger for Turkey's security, stability, international image and credibility, problems in relations with other major powers influential in the course of events such as the USA, Russia, Britain, France, and Saudi Arabia, and isolation in general. Lastly, as the JDP removed the grand strategy and the Arab Spring meant the end of

the Strategic Depth apart from assertiveness, Turkey spent the last decade without a clear, rational, and consistent strategy in its foreign policy going behind the governmental aspirations as well as destructive social, economic, and political turbulences at home.

## Notes

1. The head of the JDP in 2001-2014 and since 2017, Prime Minister in 2003-2014, President since 2014.
2. Professor of International Relations, Chief Foreign Policy Adviser to Prime Ministry in 2003-2009, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2009-2014, Prime Minister and head of JDP in 2014-2016, founder and head of the Future Party since 2019.
3. Prime Minister in 1983-1989, President in 1989-1993 until his death.

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### **About the Author**

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