

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

Milan, Italy

Department of Political and Social Sciences

PhD in Institutions and Policies

XXXVII Cycle

S.S.D. SPS/04; SPS/14



UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore

Parameters of Change and Continuity  
in Turkey's Foreign Policy  
A Historical Inside-Out Anatomy

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Academic Year 2023/24





## Abstract

*This thesis analyses the parameters of change (and continuity) in Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) from 1980 to 2024. In the context of drastic international, regional, and domestic transformations, TFP has received extensive attention in recent decades, especially since the emergence of the AKP party in 2002. On the one hand, there seems to be a consensus that Turkey has increasingly become more “visible, confident and daring,” displacing an active attitude in regional and international scenarios and a multifaceted stance towards manifold issues. On the other hand, while most studies recognize these dynamics of change, the literature remains characterized by debates about the theories, levels of analysis, and isolated case studies that only partially capture the parameters behind this process compared to earlier periods. Against this backdrop, this research draws on a flexible theoretical framework to bridge traditional International Relations (IR) approaches with more multidisciplinary ones. Drawing from “third-way” lines of research that integrate Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) with Historical International Relations (HIR) and Historical Institutionalism (HI), this study expands the analytical timeframe and de-hierarchizes the levels of investigation, conceived as external, internal, and individual. Methodologically, it employs a qualitative to conduct a cross-time inquiry of TFP supported by a combination of semi-structured interviews and archival research. The objective is to capture (1) elements of continuity and change along historical lines, (2) the two-way relationship between foreign policy shifts and domestic sociopolitical transformations, and (3) the long-term mechanisms at play in both decision-making and foreign policy formulation. Relying on a broader array of parameters, the research aims to provide a detailed and updated analysis of how external structures, internal institutional and sociopolitical dynamics, and individual agency roles all contribute to shaping Turkey’s foreign policy trajectory over time.*

## Abstract

*Il presente elaborato analizza i parametri di cambiamento (e di continuità) della politica estera turca (TFP) dal 1980 al 2024. Nel contesto di drastiche trasformazioni internazionali, regionali e interne, la politica estera turca ha ricevuto un'ampia attenzione negli ultimi decenni, soprattutto dopo l'ascesa al potere del partito AKP nel 2002. Da un lato, sembra esserci un consenso sul fatto che la Turchia sia diventata sempre più "visibile, fiduciosa e audace", assumendo un atteggiamento attivo negli scenari regionali e internazionali e una posizione sfaccettata nei confronti di molteplici questioni. D'altra parte, sebbene la maggior parte degli studi riconosca queste dinamiche di cambiamento, la letteratura rimane caratterizzata da dibattiti sulle teorie, sui livelli di analisi e su casi di studio isolati che catturano solo parzialmente i parametri alla base di questo processo rispetto ai periodi precedenti. In questo contesto, la presente ricerca si basa su un quadro teorico flessibile per supplementare gli approcci tradizionali delle Relazioni Internazionali (IR) linee di ricerca multidisciplinari. Attingendo all'emergente "terza via" che integra la Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) con Historical International Relations (HIR) e Historical Institutionalism (HI), questo studio espande l'orizzonte temporale dell'analisi e de-gerarchizza i livelli di indagine, concepiti come esterni, interni e individuali. Dal punto di vista metodologico, impiega un'analisi qualitativa per condurre un'indagine trasversale nel tempo della politica estera turca, supportata da una combinazione di interviste semi-strutturate e ricerche d'archivio. L'obiettivo è quello di cogliere: (1) gli elementi di continuità e cambiamento lungo le linee storiche; (2) la relazione bidirezionale tra i cambiamenti di politica estera e le trasformazioni sociopolitiche interne; (3) i meccanismi e gli agenti partecipanti al processo decisionale e alla formulazione della politica estera in un'ottica di lungo termine. Basandosi su una serie più ampia di parametri, la ricerca mira a fornire un'analisi dettagliata e aggiornata di come le strutture esterne, le dinamiche istituzionali e sociopolitiche interne e i ruoli di agency individuali contribuiscano a plasmare la traiettoria della politica estera della Turchia nel tempo.*

## Acknowledgments

*“The heart is the strongest muscle.”*

It was not in my plans that I would take a flight to Adana, Turkey, in 2018. Since then, many things have changed, but some have remained the same despite these turbulent times: my personal and academic love and attachment to Turkey, its complexity, and its people. As such, this thesis results from all my experiences and the people who prompted my passion and energy to keep going.

First of all, I have to thank Prof. Paolo Maria Leo Cesare Maggiolini immensely. I don’t know if it’s because we share a long list of names or because I was his first PhD student, but I felt protected by his unconditional support amidst adversities. He was echoed by two other brilliant people who have illuminated my path since day one at the University: Prof. Riccardo Redaelli and Prof. Andrea Plebani. Thank you!

The first year was definitely a double struggle. I was working full-time while pursuing my first-year classes and exams. But those hours without sleep converted hurdles into much richer scholarships and opportunities, making the rest of the journey “fly high.”

On this note, Prof. Meltem Müftüler-Baç is another person I owe a lot to. She’s been – and still is – my mentor throughout these years, but she also always made me feel part of the “Sabancı family,” a family of great minds and humans that enriched my research and research skills. Immense thanks to her, to Prof. Senem Aydin-Düzgit, Professor Berk Esen, and all the people of the Faculty.

Academia is not just made of dull and burned-out people: there’s a way to balance it with other good things in our lives. That’s what I’ve learned from Prof. Paul Levin and SUITS people during my three months in Stockholm. Paul welcomed me as a son and made terrific efforts to fix my thesis until the last day as carefully as he did with my bike after a nice Swedish festive lunch at home. I am glad to share my eclectic approach to Turkish foreign policy with someone like him. *Skål!*

Such people are rare but exist. Special thanks go to Prof. Bahar Baser for her thesis revisions, friendly support, and openness to working together as peers. With her, I thank all the other professors and experts who took the time to help me concretize my ideas. I am immensely honored to have gotten insights – and Baylan’s patisserie selection – from important and experienced personalities. Special credits to Ambassadors Selim Kuneralp, Ünal Çeviköz, and Ahmet Erozan.

It’s crazy that six years ago, I set the super high target of getting a post at the Istanbul Policy Center. And wow (!), here I am now, writing these acknowledgments from my office with a Bosphorus view at Minerva Palace. Surely, years of hard work and networking in Turkey paid off. Yet, nothing would have been possible without the support of Stiftung Mercator: special thanks go to Jannes, Derya, and the Turkey Europe Future Forum family. I am also grateful that this fellowship took me closer to great professionals and humans. Thank you, Pelin, Özüm, Funda, Gülcihan, Meryem, Seren, Johanna, Onur, Megan, Cana, and Zeynep.

Family is also what Aykan, his mother Derya, and his father Alil represent to me. Since they hosted me in 2018, I never missed visiting them in Adana at least once a year. *Sizi seviyorum!*

Another *ikinci ailem* is my “*abi/brate*” Ege’s. Even if he’s used to saying, “Don’t follow me, I’m lost too,” I got so close to him that my first and only tattoo is an *Izmir kokoreç*.

Love to the “Hasbullah Family”. Gülin, Perhat, Max, and Dorra have always been by my side in happy and sad moments. You – and Kimyon restaurant – will always have a special place in my heart.

I am grateful to all my close friends with whom I discussed Turkish politics between a *meyhane*, a football match, and a *çay*. Thanks to Jacopo, Selin, Stefano, Filippo, Italo, Massimo. Among them, a truly special mention goes to Riccardo: more than a colleague, more than a friend. Countless working nights and *döner kebabs* together made us develop tons of publications, projects, and contacts. Without his unstoppable enthusiasm and intellectual energy, I would have achieved half of what I did. It’s just the beginning. *Abrami & Gasco* has come to stay!

Nonetheless, I will never forget my roots. I am forever grateful to all my people in the remote northern countryside of Italy. To my relatives for their unreserved love. To my “blood friends” Alberto, Andrea, Fabio, Filippo, Marcello, Matteo, Marcello, and Mauro, who probably do not fully understand my job but always made me feel their esteem regardless of the kilometers between us. Thanks to Patri, Gianfranco, Gio, and MJ – and all the “big family” – whose hugs and words are special every time I leave and every time I return home.

And thank you, mum and dad, for always telling me, “If it’s not the hard way, it’s not the right way.” Thank you, *papà*. Although I did not honor my third name, Ayrton, by becoming a Formula One champion, I always try my best to reach at least 5% of what you achieved starting from zero.

Thank you, mum. Thank you for being the most important, the strongest, and the most resilient person in my life. For having taught me that shortcuts kill progress and that success should not undermine dignity. To both: I’ve always tried to put your teachings into practice as a child, as a son, as a teenager, as a student, as a sportsman, and as an adult. I’m not sure to what extent I might have succeeded, but I hope I made you proud this time again, and I will keep doing so.

All in all, I’m other than jobless, and new adventures are yet to start in Barcelona – *gracias CIDOB!* Maybe it’s because, for me, my PhD was an instrument, not a goal. I think it’s mentally healthy – and nicely selfish – to say I am proud of myself for not having paused my life, got my brain sick, my hair grey and my body stiffed to earn this degree. Contrarily, while many might not know, I made it while training more than 20 hours/week. I won some global Hyrox races, placed 12<sup>th</sup> in the 2024 World Championships, and qualified again this year. Running sets me free, and working out makes me feel alive. High heartbeats saved me in the darkest moments and cut the fog out of my mind. Habits forge discipline.

Yet, only one human in this world has always trusted my capabilities, boosted my energy, and believed I could “compete with the best” in everything I did. Thank you, Laura. For bearing with countless welcomes and goodbyes in countless cities, stations, and airports. Thank you for sharing all the downs and ups, tons of meal preps, hours in the gym, and working nights. Thank you for setting the bar consistently higher. Thank you for still being here. To achieve the best. After all these years. Together.

Because, in the end, “*zor yollar her zaman güzel yerlere götürür.*”

## **Disclaimer**

I certify that all material in this thesis that is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.



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## MAIN LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)

ANAP: *Anavatan Partisi* (Motherland Party)

CHP: *Cusmhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican Peoples' Party)

DSP : *Demokratik Sol Partisi* (Democratic Left Party)

EEC: European Economic Community

EU: European Union

FM: Foreign Minister

FPA: Foreign Policy Analysis

FPC: Foreign Policy Change

FPE: Foreign Policy Executive

HDP: *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party)

HI: Historical Institutionalism

IR: International Relation

MDP: *Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi* (Nationalist Democracy Party)

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MGK: *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council)

MHP: *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Movement Party)

MİT: *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı* (National Intelligence Agency)

MSP: *Millî Selâmet Partisi* (National Salvation Party)

MÜSİAD: *Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği* (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association)

NCR: Neoclassical Realism

PKK: *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

PS: Political Sciences

RP: *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party)

SHP: *Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti* (Social Democrat People's Party)

TCBMM: *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (Grand National Assembly of Turkey)

TCCB: *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı* (Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey)

TFP: Turkish Foreign Policy

TİKA: *Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı* (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency)

TÜSİAD: *Türk Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği* (Turkish Industry and Business Association)



# INTRODUCTION

We tell stories about the past to orient ourselves in the present and envision the future. However, when we read the past through the prism of our present, we risk closing down opportunities for different ways of imagining both the present and the future.<sup>1</sup>

There are few doubts about the fact that the current conjuncture of a transition towards a so-called multipolar (or an a-polar or non-polar) order – characterized by states constantly competing to maintain, elevate, or reconfigure their power status at the global and regional level – has presented (and presents) numerous challenges but also windows of opportunities and advantages for middle and regional powers in the international arena.<sup>2</sup> As such, considering the transition from the aftermath of World War II to the post-Cold War periods until the (re)configuration of the global arena since the late 2000s, most of the scholars and observers agree that the Republic of Turkey represents one of the states that, by geographic location, historical background, and socio-political conformation, most entails these dynamics of change.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, the end of the Cold War and the perception of an eroding US-led unipolarity in the last decade has increased Turkey's determination to gain visibility on the international stage and to play its influential role in various areas of interest. At the same time, this process has impacted – and was the result of changes in – its domestic order, which witnessed the emergence and consolidation of actors with unprecedented characteristics for the Turkish sociopolitical context. Among them, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) is arguably the most noteworthy agent in shaping a visible and enduring restructuring process. In this regard, these continuously evolving phases highly impacted Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP), which has renewed a strong interest in the topic in academia – and beyond – since 2002.

However, as this thesis seeks to investigate, Foreign Policy Change (FPC) can occur at multiple levels, ranging from minor policy adjustments on specific issues to more profound reorientations that reflect a fundamental shift in direction.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this work stems from three

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<sup>1</sup> Kessler, O., & Leira, H. (2024). Stories we live by: The rise of Historical IR and the move to concepts. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 37(4), 421.

<sup>2</sup> See Ehteshami, A. (2024). Multipolarity and the Middle East Questions going forward. In B. Houghton & K. A. Houghton (Eds.), *China, Russia, and the USA in the Middle East: The contest for supremacy*. Routledge; Græger, N., Heurlin, B., Wæver, O., & Wivel, A. (Eds.). (2022). *Polarity in International Relations: Past, Present, Future*. Springer International Publishing. Lieber, R. J. (2022). Polarity, Non-polarity, and the Risks of A-Polarity. In N. Græger, B. Heurlin, O. Wæver, & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Polarity in International Relations* (pp. 171–189). Springer International Publishing; Wohlforth, W. C. (2022). Polarity and International Order: Past and Future. In N. Græger, B. Heurlin, O. Wæver, & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Polarity in International Relations: Past, Present, Future* (pp. 411–424). Springer International Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> Aydın, M. (2019). Foreign policy, 1923–2018. In A. Özerdem & M. Whiting (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (1st ed., pp. 367–377). Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview, see Joly, J. K., & Haesebrouck, T. (Eds.). (2021). *Foreign Policy Change in Europe Since 1991*. Springer International Publishing; Hermann, C. F. (1990). Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 34(1), 3.

primary considerations. First, a “historical anatomy” implies that the change process is investigated on a broader timespan with particular reference to the Özalist period since the early 1980s and the AKP era up until mid-2024. At the same time, this also means accepting that parameters of change and continuity can sometimes overlap when confronted with the foundational Kemalist pillars of the Republic of Turkey, but also when different aspects of the same government period are taken into account. Second, an “inside-out anatomy” is a corollary of such a broader analysis in the sense that this thesis aims to disengage from strict theoretical and disciplinary boundaries in favor of an approach that explores foreign policy change by drawing from strands of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), Historical International Relations (HIR) and Historical Institutionalism (HI). Third, this choice of topic also originates from the impression that “change” often accompanies day-to-day analyses of Turkey’s political dynamics, but its origins and the continuity with the country’s past experiences are often overlooked.

On the one hand, there seems to be a consensus that Turkey has increasingly become more “visible, confident and daring”<sup>5</sup>, displacing an extremely active attitude in regional and international scenarios and a multifaceted stance towards manifold issues.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, what has emerged with clear evidence is not only a deeper involvement of this country in “its conventional geographical endeavors” such as the Middle East and North Africa but also a proactive presence in traditionally hazardous areas like the Balkans or “out-of-bounds” ones such as the Horn of Africa, as well as its “game changer” mindset in the Caucasian, post-Soviet, and Eastern Mediterranean conundrums.<sup>7</sup> Concurrently, what were considered the pillars of the Republican era, marked by the Kemalist state ideology and a robust pro-Western stance, began to be questioned because internal institutional and sociopolitical changes overlapped with Ankara’s quest for more margin of maneuver in foreign policy. In examining TFP evolution under the AKP, scholars have debated to what extent this more than twenty years-long era represents a break from the historical trajectory of TFP. This is particularly evident in discussions surrounding the so-called “shift of axis” debate about Turkey’s increasing engagement with the Middle East and its growing Euroscepticism or discontent towards the West by the end of the first decade of the 2000s.<sup>8</sup> The literature often presents apparent dichotomies between

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<sup>5</sup> Mufti, M. (2009). *Daring and caution in Turkish strategic culture: Republic at sea*. Palgrave Macmillan; Mufti, M. (2023). Turkey at 100: Between Constancy and Change. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 20(78), 5–20; Robins, P. (2013). Turkey’s ‘double gravity’ predicament: The foreign policy of a newly activist power. *International Affairs*, 89(2), 381–397.

<sup>6</sup> Flanagan, S., Larrabee, F., Binnendijk, A., Costello, K., Efron, S., Hoobler, J., Kirchner, M., Martini, J., Nader, A., & Wilson, P. (2020). *Turkey’s Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army*. RAND Corporation.

<sup>7</sup> Müftüler Baç, M. (2021). Turkey’s Grand Strategy in the Context of Global and Regional Challenges. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 25(2), 178–202; Altunışık, M. B. (2023). The trajectory of a modified middle power: An attempt to make sense of Turkey’s foreign policy in its centennial. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 658–672.

<sup>8</sup> Alpan, B. (2016). From AKP’s ‘Conservative Democracy’ to ‘Advanced Democracy’: Shifts and Challenges in the Debate on ‘Europe.’ *South European Society and Politics*, 21(1), 15–28; Kösebalaban, H. (2011). Turkey and the New Middle East: Between

the long-lasting traditional Republican era marked by Kemalist pro-Western values, the AKP's early years characterized by pro-European Union (EU) democratic engagement, and a later phase marked by an Islamist, anti-Western, authoritarian turn. However, this binary perspective has been challenged by several studies that aim to place the AKP's strategies within the broader historical continuity of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> According to this view, although the AKP's foreign policy choices may align with Turkey's strategic goals<sup>10</sup>, there are also discernible ruptures within its policy discourse. As such, this might reflect shifts in response to evolving domestic and international contexts, as in the case of Turgut Özal's proactive policies during the late 1980s or the difficulties of coping with the end of the Cold War by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, looking at the current literature strands, it appears that, despite an increasing abundance, "the process of foreign policy-making is one of the least well-studied aspects of Turkish Foreign Policy," and suggestions can often only be speculative or illustrated by occasional examples that overlook broader and slower historical processes.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the dominant view in the literature is tempted to explain TFP either by looking at it as a reaction to systemic changes or as a consequence of leadership and ideological changes. However, both approaches raise some dilemmas when considering the interlink between foreign and domestic politics. First, by overlooking the patterns of continuity and change throughout expanded timeframes, the risk is to take for granted that TFP before the AKP was characterized by straightforward parameters, boundaries, and coherent behavior. Second, realist arguments, such as the "axis shift" in the course of the same government, fail to explain continuations and changes in TFP after 2002. Third, at the same time, focusing only on domestic politics would favor a perception that Turkey's foreign policy-making is not affected by several regional or international pressures, reducing Turkish decision-makers' motivations to be shaped either by their ideologies or "sense of power."<sup>13</sup>

In this regard, attempts to trace and measure the parameters, determinants, and outcomes of this trajectory of Ankara's foreign policy have generated new debates among scholars of International

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Liberalism and Realism. *Perceptions (Ankara, Turkey)*, 16(3), 93; Coban Oran, F. (2022). The false promise of Europeanisation in Turkey's national identity discourse. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 30(3), 419–432.

<sup>9</sup> Hatipoglu, E., & Palmer, G. (2016). Contextualizing change in Turkish foreign policy: The promise of the 'two-good' theory. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29(1), 231–250; Hoffmann, C., & Cemgil, C. (2016). The (un)making of the Pax Turca in the Middle East: Understanding the social-historical roots of foreign policy. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29(4), 1279–1302; Özpek, B. B., & Tanriverdi Yaşar, N. (2018). Populism and foreign policy in Turkey under the AKP rule. *Turkish Studies*, 19(2), 198–216.

<sup>10</sup> Aydın, M. (2020). Grand Strategizing in and for Turkish Foreign Policy: Lessons Learned from History, Geography and Practice. *Perceptions (Ankara, Turkey)*, 25(2), 203–226.

<sup>11</sup> Taş, H. (2022). Continuity through change: Populism and foreign policy in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(12), 2869–2887, p. 9

<sup>12</sup> Exceptions are, for instance, Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> Bagdonas, Ö. D. (2008). A Poststructuralist Approach to Ideology and Foreign Policy: Kemalism in the Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse. *Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Central European University*.



Relations (IR) and Political Sciences (PS) in terms of which explanatory factors, disciplinary approaches, and scientific methods help to address related questions on the causes and future directions of Turkey. Concurrently, Area Studies and different realms of History have begun to discuss the dynamics of continuity and change as well as the defining pillars of the Turkish state, leadership, and sociopolitical constituencies along a broader time frame. Therefore, this revamped interest has often generated debates based on the traditional IR-History boundary, opening space for *cross-* and *multi-*disciplinary inquiries towards a so-called “third way.” In this regard, Özdamar provides a valuable insight about how to approach the issue:

...understanding and explaining the complexities of Turkish foreign policy is not an easy task and requires immense effort and training. Focusing on all three levels of analysis (system, state, and individual) and making the necessary connections between those factors objectively and empirically is required. A commitment to the agent-based study of decision-making is needed to create realistic analyses. Opening the ‘black box of state’ and daring to account for multiple factors shaping foreign policy decision-making is of the greatest importance. Using mid-range theories to make mid-level generalizations and explanations of Turkish foreign policy in an empirical manner is the way forward for TFP studies.<sup>14</sup>

These developments suggest a need to reconsider the relationship between domestic political dynamics and foreign policy, both in theory and practice. Foreign policy formulation is inherently a complex process shaped by the interplay of actors' interests in both domestic and international politics. It reflects a dual or “nested game” where policymakers must balance internal pressures with external affairs, adapting strategies to manage both domains effectively.<sup>15</sup> In this context, the complexity of this “multilevel game” is heightened by several factors: the simultaneous need to address multiple domestic political imperatives; the contingent effects of domestic politics based on leaders' choices of alternative political strategies; and the subtle impacts that these dual strategies can have on foreign policy outcomes. In this sense, “no leader, no matter how autocratic, is completely immune from domestic pressure.”<sup>16</sup>

However, while many studies have examined how the rise of the AKP has impacted TFP, few have focused on how changes in governance modes, party leadership, and domestic political struggles have gradually influenced Turkey's external orientation. In this sense, considering the importance of systemic and external parameters should not obscure how foreign policy can also be viewed as an outcome of political struggles between different sociopolitical actors. In the case of Turkey, this occurs in the confrontations between the Özalist and AKP-led approaches with the Kemalist

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<sup>14</sup> See Özdamar, Ö. (2023, June 10). How to Analyze the Complexity of Turkish Foreign Policy-Making? *Panorama Global*.

<sup>15</sup> Trumbore and Boyer.

<sup>16</sup> Özdamar, 2023.

establishment. For instance, foreign policy discourses, including those underpinning the so-called “Turkish model,” might represent an instrument for consolidating the positions of confident leaders and political actors within the national arena. However, these narratives can also be adjusted or abandoned as the foundations of domestic political dominance evolve. In summary, Turkish foreign policy, particularly under the AKP, cannot be understood solely in terms of a linear shift toward an Islamist or anti-Western orientation. Instead, it reflects a nuanced interaction between domestic political struggles, evolving governance strategies, and external pressures highlighting the complexity of foreign policy decision-making in more fluid regional and global orders.

Therefore, this project agrees with the necessity of finding a balance between the usual assumptions about TFP. If it is true that elite ideas in Turkey are not easy to change because they are highly institutionalized in the state tradition, at the same time, it might be seemingly easy to claim that TFP is typically dependent on government and leaders’ identities. Yet, in that case, it is hard to conclude that there is a clear-cut continuity, either within the pre-AKP era or in the course of the various AKP governments. Therefore, TFP appears to be shaped neither simply by government changes nor easily wielded on environmental transformations. In other words, this means that external systemic/structural alterations and domestic or leadership changes alone cannot explain paradigmatic shifts in TFP. In parallel, as the literature review will demonstrate, labeling Turkey’s sociopolitical actors involved in the formulation of different policies at different levels with just one interpretative category like liberalism, Islamism, nationalism, or Kemalism undermines what both Area Studies and the recent turn in “global IR” have underlined: that is, the risk of missing the nuances characterizing a specific milieu in which the state is not a monolithic entity, but rather a sum of historical processes of formation, role conception, and learning experiences involving leaders and the populace.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, this thesis builds on the necessity to find additional explanatory factors to bridge the void between these different dimensions in the study of TFP.<sup>18</sup> Concurrently, it seeks to open new paths for the study of this subject with a broader view that considers the fundamental “first steps of change” started in the 1980s. In light of these premises, it aims to fill the gap in comprehensively assessing the main drivers, bases, and outcomes of TFP. Although it relies on existing empirical data (primary and secondary resources) and resonates through empirical outcomes (historical conjunctures

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<sup>17</sup> Zarakol has extensively worked on this issue. Among all, see Zarakol, A. (2022). *Before the West: The rise and fall of eastern world orders*. Cambridge University Press. See also Bilgin, P., & Smith, K. (2024). *Thinking Globally About World Politics: Beyond Global IR*. Springer Nature Switzerland; D’Amato, S., Dian, M., & Russo, A. (Eds.). (2023). *International Relations and Area Studies: Debates, Methodologies and Insights from Different World Regions*. Springer International Publishing.

<sup>18</sup> Şahin, M. (2020). Theorizing the Change: A Neoclassical Realist Approach to Turkish Foreign Policy. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 7(4), 483–500.

and contingencies), it mainly aims to investigate the processes that link the two. This means analyzing TFP making as a cumulative process in which patterns of continuity and change can overlap rather than a simple mechanical and deterministic understanding based on variables selected hierarchically.

As Sinem Adar notes,

Given that the AKP's rule "makes one-fifth of the entire republican period and five years more than Atatürk's term in power"<sup>19</sup>, it is almost inevitable that such a long period would impact politics and society. Still, not only the question of how much of the old is dead, but also that of what has replaced it remain unanswered given not only the pace of the change, but also the state of flux and crisis that has accompanied it. Even less clear is to what extent the new constellation of actors, institutions, and ideas is durable. Our knowledge of what the political and societal transformation of the last two decades entails, therefore, needs to be deepened.<sup>20</sup>

These considerations are reflected in the outline of this thesis, which, contrary to many binding theoretical frameworks, embraces an expanded timeframe. Therefore, PART 1 is dedicated to a historical survey of TFP through a critical review of the literature that embraces the origins of its foreign policy since the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic in 1923, followed by a literature review of the following eras until recent times. Then, a deep discussion on theoretical and mixed-methods approaches is provided. This is followed by PART 2, which presents an analysis of the first external-internal changes that began with Turgut Özal's era in the 1980s, often considered the first real process of change – or at least a serious attempt – in TFP. However, whereas the literature is abundant with analysis of the changes between different eras and under different Turkish leadership, this thesis seeks to trace processes of change and continuity both *between* different timeframes of Turkey's political history and *within* shorter periods characterized by "less visible" or "less drastic" alterations. As such, to verify the lines of continuity and change at different levels within a specific case, PART 3 delves into the AKP-ruled governments' different periods. Throughout the study, a central focus is dedicated to those actors and agents who have experienced significant changes in the last decade but who, at the same time, remain attached *to* and influenced *by* more long-term processes. Therefore, these processes are not studied in a vacuum. Instead, they are connected with the stimuli originated by an external environment that conditions leaders and social actors' room of maneuver (in practical terms) and their interpretation through different lenses (in ideational terms). As such, this research investigates both actors of visible high politics (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister/Presidency Cabinet, National Security Council) and other players that have obtained

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<sup>19</sup> Aytürk, İ. (2021). In the Turkish Context, the Term Conservatism Creates More Problems of Categorization than It Solves...: İlker Aytürk interviewed by Zeynep Bursa, Béatrice Garapon and Dilek Sarmis. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Adar, S. (2022). Understanding Turkey's Political Transformation: Mechanisms, Actors, and Perceptions. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 34, p. 2.

(or lost) agency in the foreign policy and decision-making process, such as civil society, parties, minorities, and media.

Therefore, the general objective is to adjust something that has already been recognized<sup>21</sup> – but only partially – around one key question: *What are the parameters of change in Turkish Foreign Policy, and how is their reciprocal influence on each other related to Turkey's complexity in terms of historical state-formation, institutional-public relations, ideational-pragmatic elements, and leader's images-national role conception?* The central thesis is that change in TFP does not occur exclusively because of (exclusively) internal or external parameters in a specific period but 1) on the basis of a longer historical process where a “two-way interaction” is at play; 2) because of other “middle parameters” that condition decision and policy-making processes. Thus, under the spotlight of these core issues in the existing debate, it is essential to outline some sub-questions that were drawn from the critical literature review as provided in the following sections:

1. In the context of changing international scenarios that began in the 1980s, is Turkey a proactive or a reactive player? Is its current international role the result of a “longer historical learning process”?
2. Is TFP elaborated more according to its material capabilities or the ideological preferences of its leadership? How do equilibrium transformations at the socio-political and institutional level influence Turkey's decision-making and foreign policy-making?
3. Who are the main actors involved in this process? Which elements influence their perceptions and reactions? What are the relations between state-institutional formation, traditional strategic culture, historical role perception, and the emergence of new sociopolitical forces and ideas?
4. Is Turkey's decision-making and policy-making process a “one-man show” or still constrained by a plurality of actors, different constraints, and evolving types of interests?

Although the abovementioned questions depict a primal attempt to deconstruct a brand-new historical inquiry, the originality of this project stands on two additional pillars. Firstly, not aprioristically excluding any dimension, it points to overcoming the polarization between rigorous

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<sup>21</sup> Just to name some, Tziarras, Z. (2022). *Turkish Foreign Policy: The Lausanne Syndrome in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*. Springer International Publishing; Aydın, E. (2023). Theory importation and the death of homegrown disciplinary potential: An autopsy of Turkish IR. *Third World Quarterly*, 1–18; Oğuzlu, T., & Han, A. K. (2023). Making Sense of Turkey's Foreign Policy from the Perspective of Neorealism. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 20(78), 59–77; Kubicek, P. (2022). Contrasting theoretical approaches to Turkish foreign policy. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 645–658. See also the ones cited in the literature review on NCR and third-way approaches.

evaluations by building on a multiple-level analysis that allows for a well-balanced heterogeneity by applying its own research design. Secondly, its purpose stems also from the necessity to update structured results to ever-changing exogenous and endogenous dynamics affecting Turkish politics. It does not rely on a unilateral preference for a specific set of ready-to-use variables. Instead, it encompasses their interrelations to obtain evidence on multiple yet complementary levels by seeking a solid reference to a historical perspective. Overall, this project aims to represent an updated version of those few works that go beyond the general tendency to merely identify domestic, systemic, or both kinds of foreign policy drivers.<sup>22</sup> Thus, its additional strength and potential contribution is that it points to describing TFP's drivers and tracking the causal chains in a particular foreign policy behavior while looking at different sociopolitical units along a broader diachronic frame. Consequently, the scope is also to detect better which parameters are most important in TFP and understand how specific chains of mechanisms correlate with different agents, constituencies, and foreign policy behaviors from the 1980s up until 2024.

Behind this approach is the idea that, primarily due to some empirical limitations, the identified relationships between external and internal parameters may only sometimes be so definite as to argue for direct or specific causation.<sup>23</sup> However, the correlations deducted in such instances remain valuable, given that they offer significant insights into each parameter and its relationship with internal and external grounds of the Turkish political field. Adopting such a perspective will help to address some of the shortcomings in the literature on TFP: (1) overlooking the grey area that lies at the domestic-foreign frontier; (2) taking for granted the role of the Turkish state as a monolithic unit without considering the different constituencies of its conformation; (3) missing the historical dimensions that allow grasping how the long-term mechanisms of learning, contesting, and conceiving the role of the country affect decision-making processes and foreign policy outcomes. To do so, as will be further explained in the methodological section, this project's multilevel analysis relies on two parallel approaches. First, adopting and appreciating the importance of a historical analysis allows for the inclusion of multiple sources. On the one hand, the secondary literature can be "tested" or "confronted" with primary sources coming from recently opened archives or publications from the Turkish state institutions and diplomatic memoirs for the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic. On the other hand, historical insight does not imply keeping political

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<sup>22</sup> Some examples are Aydın, M. (1994). *Foreign Policy Formation And The Interaction Between Domestic And International Environments A Study of Change in Turkish Foreign Policy During 1980* [PhD Thesis]. Lancaster University; Sönmez, G. (2017). *The interplay between international and domestic factors in Turkey's grand strategy-making: Activism, disappointment, and readjustment* [PhD Thesis, SOAS University]; Sönmez, G. (2020). *A neoclassical realist approach to Turkey under JDP rule*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing; Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era* [PhD Thesis]. University of Birmingham.

<sup>23</sup> Tziarras, Z. (2014). *Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East under the AKP (2002-2013): A Neoclassical Realist Account* [PhD Thesis]. University of Warwick, 8.

events and personalities fossilized in the past but tracing a more solid and reliable linkage between the “present and the past.”<sup>24</sup> Concretely, drawing from HIR and HI means seeking to identify foreign policy change not as clear-cut evidence but as a more blurred process of modifications, failures, unclear paths, and learning processes occurring over either a shorter or longer timespan. Second, adopting FPA theories and methods helps to set the parameters and the “grounds” within which these processes can be identified. In this sense, while a historical perspective helps situate foreign policy making and outcomes into a specific context, an FPA outlook is functional to complement it with instruments to identify the separation – and at the same time, the connections – between the “political fields” in which various agents (e.g., the state, the parties, public opinion...) operate and interact.<sup>25</sup> In addition, this allows us to set the parameters for methods like elite interviews, which open the possibility to compare, validate, or question broader literature strains, concepts, and ways of looking into the component of the Turkish state and its manifestations in terms of foreign policy. Therefore, the next section will explain on which bases and how these components are assembled into the structure of this thesis.

To sum up, this study builds on a multilevel analysis that examines the interplay between external and internal factors, as mid-range theories suggest. Certainly, in this regard, Neoclassical Realism (NCR) represents a valid starting point for questioning some of the traditional pillars within IR scholarship and providing a multilevel analysis. However, aiming to overcome those typical debates of IR and PS, this thesis relies on a pioneer flexible analytical framework drawn on recent theories of FPC that leave room for a more multidisciplinary understanding. With a “dialogue” between FPA and an HI approach, it includes both material and ideational factors to de-hierarchize the relations between three significant aspects: transformations in the global and regional systems, alteration in domestic politics, and changes in individual leadership and immaterial factors.

In practical terms, it analyzes TFP’s change on three levels. The external level is intended to be the international and regional dimensions, meaning that Turkey’s external policies have to operate and be dosed in light of a combination of stimuli and constraints from the outside and elaborated by considering its material capabilities. Second, the internal level refers to the continuities and changes in Turkey’s domestic realm. It considers who makes the decision (the Foreign Policy Executive, FPE), in which context (national role conception), through which mechanisms (structure and institutions), what (ideas, perceptions, personal gains), and who (agents) can condition foreign policy decisions,

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<sup>24</sup> For an overview, see Pocock, J. G. A. (1962). *The Origins of Study of the Past: A Comparative Approach. Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4(2), 209–246; Bachleitner, K. (2019). *Diplomacy with Memory: How the Past Is Employed for Future Foreign Policy. Foreign Policy Analysis*, 15(4), 492–508. Additional references will be provided in a dedicated section.

<sup>25</sup> The concept of the “political field” is well introduced into the Middle East region by Zubaida in Zubaida, S. (2009). *Islam, the people and the state: Political ideas and movements in the Middle East* (New 3rd ed). I.B. Tauris.

and to whom the latter is directed (constituencies, audience, political legitimacy). Finally, this project makes a valuable distinction by adding a third level of analysis. Indeed, it includes the relationship between the pillars and the evolutionary phases of Turkey's strategic culture in an attempt to grasp how Turkey's foreign policy role is one of a contested nature. It thus incorporates mechanisms of regime survival as well as the relation between the visible ruling elite and other less visible yet influencing agents. In addition, relevance is given to immaterial factors in the form of ideology, culture, and perceptions at different strata of the Turkish sociopolitical realm.

Methodologically, this study operates through a qualitative analysis for a cross-time investigation of TFP that combines archival research with semi-structured interviews. Overall, the objective is to capture: (1) elements of *continuity and change* along historical lines; (2) the *two-way effect* linking changes in foreign policy and domestic politics; (3) *the long-term mechanism* at play in the decision- and foreign policy-making.

# PART 1: CRITICAL HISTORICAL REVIEW OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY, THEORIES, AND METHODS

## 1. CRITICAL HISTORICAL REVIEW OF TFP

In examining the foreign policy of a multifaceted country like the Republic of Turkey, this thesis looks at it as an evolutionary process. This implies considering the perspective of historical context and systemic changes as well as the perspective of internal sociopolitical actors and institutional variations. Thus, this work's reference to "change" in Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) is not to be intended as an absolute departure from previous doctrines and pillars but rather as a reworking of the state's self-conception as well as an attempt to reposition in the context of changing global politics and increased material power. Emerging gradually in response to the impulses of the international system and the mutual influence between internal and external grounds, Turkey's current foreign policy directions undoubtedly present essential new elements compared to the previous century. Yet, these elements have neither arisen *ex novo* nor by the sole hand of the ruling AKP party since 2002. On the contrary, whereas it is undeniable that recent times have seen a revaluation of the traditional paradigms deeply rooted in the features of Kemalism<sup>1</sup>, the *raison d'être* of this development from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until nowadays remains anchored to the country's intricate historical course.

Until the 1990s, Turkey's establishment continued to err on the side of caution based on lessons learned from the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to this view, the Ottoman Empire collapsed mainly due to its elites' adventurous foreign policy and their expansionist and desirous outlook.<sup>2</sup> However, at the same time, after World War II and during the Cold War, the hallmark of TFP remained an approach that prioritized a stable national interest defined by the inviolability of

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<sup>1</sup> Political ideology elaborated by the founder of the Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and outlined in principles known as the "six arrows" (*altı ok* in Turkish): populism, republicanism, secularism, secularism, nationalism and "revolutionarism. See Akşin, S. (2011). The Nature of the Kemalist Revolution. In S. Akşin (Ed.), *Essays in Ottoman-Turkish Political History* (pp. 209–218). Gorgias Press.

<sup>2</sup> This does not imply full agreement within the different Turkish political units. However, this was certainly the main vision among the most visible and powerful elites that would then take power for a long time. Hale, 2012; Sander, O. (1984). Turkish Foreign Policy: Forces of Continuity and of Change. In A. Evin (Ed.), *Modern Turkey: Continuity and Change* (pp. 115–130). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften; Balci, A. (2015). *Türkiye dış politikası: İlkeler, aktörler, uygulamalar* (4. baskı). Etkileşim Yayınları; Ömer, K. (1980). "Dış Politika" Nedir? Türkiye'deki Dünyü ve Bugünü. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 35(1), 1.



Turkey's borders and a predominantly Western orientation.<sup>3</sup> This high degree of continuity and uniformity was not just limited to Turkey, as the foreign policies of small and middle-sized countries primarily reflected the bipolar nature of the international system that left little room for developing an independent foreign policy. In such a polarized international setting, multilateral institutions enhanced the negotiation power of small-middle/regional powers.<sup>4</sup> Not atypically for such countries, Turkey sought to adhere to membership in the vital multilateral frameworks of the Western camp (the Council of Europe 1949, the OECD 1948, and NATO 1952) to "intensify its negotiation power and security, boost its international status, and compensate for its relative lack of independent foreign policy."<sup>5</sup> Yet, during Turgut Özal's era as Prime Minister (1983-1989) and later as President (1989-1993), TFP took a more proactive stance, at least in its *modus operandi*. This period was characterized by a blend of pragmatic economic liberalization and an "Özalist" vision that incorporated strong ideational elements. Indeed, Özal's foreign policy was marked by a strategic ambition to transform Turkey into a dynamic player on the global stage, drawing on Turkey's historical, cultural, and geographic assets to position it as a bridge between East and West. His vision was underpinned by an understanding of Turkey's unique role in fostering dialogue between different civilizations, particularly between the West and the Islamic world. His view emphasized not only economic openness and integration with Western institutions but also cultural and ideological outreach to Turkey's historical sphere of influence in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans. Moreover, Özal's era was also distinct from previous periods in Turkish politics due to the increased capacity of a political leader to reshape policy-making mechanisms in the post-1980 coup environment. The 1982 Constitution, which sought to balance civil-military relations by curbing the military's political influence and strengthening the executive branch, enabled Özal to exert greater personal authority over foreign policy. He leveraged this power to pursue a multifaceted diplomatic agenda, often bypassing traditional state institutions or aligning them more closely with his reformist vision. On the internal and individual level, Özal's tenure coincided with the rise of a new Anatolian elite — often referred to as the "Anatolian Tigers" — a class of conservative, entrepreneurial businesspeople who benefited from his liberal economic reforms. This new elite supported Özal's vision of integrating Turkey into the global economy and diversifying its international partnerships, marking a shift from the secular, state-oriented economic policies of the past. This dynamic alignment between Özal's

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<sup>3</sup> Aydın, M. (2000). Determinants of Turkish foreign policy: Changing patterns and conjunctures during the Cold War. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36(1), 103–139.

<sup>4</sup> The debate on the term will be partially explained later.

<sup>5</sup> Aydın, 2000. See also Leffler, M. P. (1985). Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952. *The Journal of American History*, 71(4), 807.

ideational foreign policy vision, the liberal economic agenda, and the rise of new social and economic actors in Turkey helped an attempt to redefine the country's role in the post-Cold War world, emphasizing a proactive and diversified foreign policy strategy that sought both Western integration and regional influence.

With the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, Turkey found itself at a crossroads, with emerging calls for a more active foreign policy. However, the country faced significant limitations during this time, including constrained material capabilities and domestic instability stemming from fragile coalition governments unable to address internal threats such as terrorism and economic crises. Despite this shift in domestic politics and the rise of Islamist movements and parties, TFP remained predominantly Western-oriented until the mid-2000s.

However, the political scenery began to evolve with the ascent of the AKP to power in 2002. Initially, the AKP administration pursued extensive domestic political reforms, signaling a potential but balanced shift towards a more audacious foreign policy stance. This coincided with efforts to align Turkey more closely with Western norms, particularly in response to the European Union (EU) harmonization packages aimed at qualifying Turkey for EU membership. These early reforms harvested strong domestic and international support, reflecting Turkey's aspirations for greater integration with Western institutions while representing a "benign rule maker" model for its neighborhood. Yet, Turkey's foreign policy objectives have been a noticeable pivot since the AKP's second term consolidated its power in 2007. The focus began to slide away from Western integration towards stressing Turkey's role in the Middle East. This strategic realignment gained momentum following the series of protest movements that swept across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, signaling Turkey's ambitions in its neighborhood and presenting itself as a rising power in the international arena. In the following years, Turkey witnessed intense debate within its inner circles over the direction of its foreign policy. Critics accused the AKP of pursuing overly adventurous strategies, particularly as Turkey sought to assert itself as a regional power in a rapidly changing global landscape. This period coincided with significant shifts in international politics, including the transformation of regional power dynamics, conflictual interests between essential players, and the emergence of new actors on the world stage. Against this backdrop, Turkish political elites had to redefine the direction of the TFP. There was a growing consensus among policymakers that Turkey should pursue a more assertive foreign policy to safeguard its national interests and counter traditional and emerging threats. This period also witnessed significant institutional changes within Turkey, from regime survival strategies to the resurgence of nativist and nationalistic discourses. This has emphasized the narrative of a "New Turkey" ready to bring changes in many domestic features and discourses of a new foreign policy meant to make the country capable of asserting its autonomy on

the world stage. As a result, throughout a process still in the making, Turkey has lately adopted a more assertive, unilateral, and aggressive posture in its foreign policy approach, reflecting its aspirations for strategic autonomy in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. Therefore, one can safely state that, since 2002, unprecedented activism in TFP behavior has been widely recognized. However, the combination of a multifaceted stance towards many issues with domestic alterations under AKP-led governments has polarized the debate among scholars, experts, and practitioners around whether changes in TFP are mostly explicable either by systemic or domestic, by material or ideational factors.

Secondly, another quandary affecting the analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy involves a diachronic dimension, which mainly derives from the different categories and thematic timeframes used by several studies in elaborating a periodization of the phenomenon along the turnarounds occurring in the lengthy AKP era. Indeed, although the emphasis on external effects and theoretical approaches has recently increased<sup>6</sup>, traditional TFP literature is mainly limited to descriptive historical narratives of essential events, disputes, bilateral relations, and strategic alliances, heavily relying on political history. Still, without excluding Turkey's geopolitical self/other conceptions.<sup>7</sup> In parallel, even the literature that employs a more interpretive framework of analysis tends to be rigid in dividing the periods of the TFP according to domestic government changes<sup>8</sup>, arguing that there are significant differences in foreign policy between pre-AKP and AKP periods referring only to the changing national role conceptions.<sup>9</sup> Also, recent accounts of the TFP seem to fall under the same traditional contradiction. On the one hand, many claim that, regardless of the governing party, TFP was mainly shaped by Kemalism<sup>10</sup> and Westernization<sup>11</sup> until 2002. On the other hand, the periodization is based on domestic governmental changes as if there were only significant differences between them, disregarding possible evolutionary past-present gradations.<sup>12</sup> However, since the relationship between structure – which is understood in terms of different variables – and agents is not analyzed sufficiently<sup>13</sup>, continuity and change patterns remain unclear, especially in the case of

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<sup>6</sup> Hale, 2012. Gözen Ercan, P. (Ed.). (2017). *Turkish Foreign Policy. International Relations, Legality and Global Reach*. Springer International Publishing; Yesilyurt, N. (2017). Explaining Miscalculation and Maladaptation in Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East during the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*.

<sup>7</sup> Yalvaç, F. (2014). Approaches to Turkish foreign policy: A critical realist analysis. *Turkish Studies*, 15(1), 117–138.

<sup>8</sup> Bingöl, O. (2019). Changing Balancing Behaviors in Turkish Foreign Policy During AKP Period (2002-2019). *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 13(25), 53-77.

<sup>9</sup> Mehtap, Kara, & Sözen, A. (2016). Change and continuity in Turkish foreign policy: Evaluating pre-AKP and AKP periods' national role conceptions. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 13(52), 47-66.

<sup>10</sup> Ezikoğlu, Ç. (2021). *The logic of political survival in Turkey: The case of AKP*. Lexington Books.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see Oran, F. C. (2023). *Religion, Nationalism and Foreign Policy: Discursive Construction of New Turkey's Identity*. Bloomsbury.

<sup>12</sup> Şahin, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Yalvaç, 2014.

pre-AKP and AKP era comparisons.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, this historiographic approach certainly succeeds in capturing the changes after AKP came to power and in identifying Turkey as “proactive”<sup>15</sup>, but falls short when embracing strict explanatory that, for instance, automatically equalizes contingent policies with new forms of national interest<sup>16</sup> as well as interpret AKP’s novel geopolitical mindset as a total paradigm shift.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, despite an already rich literature on the topic, a second notable aspect is that most of the analyses are focus-oriented on specific realms and/or restricted in their timeframe under consideration. Therefore, they reiterate some shortcomings. First, there is a tendency to overlook the “grey area” that lies at the domestic-foreign frontier in a peculiar country such as Turkey, which is characterized by liminality in terms of geography, culture, and sociopolitical traditions. Second, the role of the Turkish state is often taken for granted as a monolithic unit. However, it is difficult to understand what and who shapes Ankara's foreign policy without considering the different constituencies and forces at the basis of its national and institutional formation process. Third, analyses of foreign policy have for a long time forgotten to include a substantive historical dimension. This prevents understanding how the long-term mechanisms of *learning*, *contesting*, and *conceiving* the country's role affect both decision-making processes and foreign policy outcomes. As P. Kubicek aptly resumes, “While even casual observers of TFP can all agree that something is different about many of its most recent manifestations, there is no consensus about what is behind this shift.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, looking in general at recent publications on Turkey’s sociopolitical dynamics in various contexts, one can affirm that the cumulative interrelation of unmatched factors in the country during the last two decades has caused scholars to question some of the classical epistemological categorizations.

Whether being referred to Turkey’s international relations, domestic politics, or historical/social background, this overturn seems to have taken a direction that somehow goes beyond traditional debates within the same field (in terms of theories and approaches) as well as between different disciplines (in terms of instruments, sources, variables). Consequently, an increased plurality of interpretative lenses has produced a likewise plurality of results in different directions

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<sup>14</sup> As an illustration, Turkey’s accession to the EU was already initiated by Özal in 1987 and furthered by Çiller and Ecevit. In this regard, AKP’s policy toward the EU was not a new perspective, but it was the continuation of traditional TFP, which aims for Westernization. Despite that, AKP policies are considered a changing approach with regard to the relationship with the European Union.

<sup>15</sup> Öniş, Z., & Kutlay, M. (2013). Rising Powers in a Changing Global Order: The Political Economy of Turkey in the Age of BRICS. *Third World Quarterly*, 34(8), 1409–1426.

<sup>16</sup> Aras, B. (2014). Davutoğlu Era in Turkish foreign policy revisited. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 16(4), 404–418.

<sup>17</sup> Sözen, A. (2010). A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges. *Turkish Studies*, 11(1), 103–123.

<sup>18</sup> Kubicek, P. (2022). Contrasting theoretical approaches to Turkish foreign policy. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 646.

and ways to interpret TFP from different angles: (1) the adoption (or refusal) of fixed labels, categories, and explants in the analysis of Turkey's actorness, policies, and the relevance of its multiple constituencies; (2) discussions on whether, in the regional and the international arena, Turkey's rising "powerness" has been shifting from a *status quo*-oriented attitude to a revisionist one; (3) the prominence given to the drivers behind Turkey's foreign policy making, whether them being either structural/systemic, ideological/identity-based, or being a polygonal phenomenon that produces – and is at the same time product of – a more nuanced dynamics operating at different levels. This is all well summarized by an issue of the *Turkish Studies* journal entitled *Interdisciplinarity and Comparison in Turkish Studies*, which states that

“more than commonality [...], it is also clear that the emerging field of Turkish Studies has matured beyond simply viewing Turkey as an interesting case. One can argue [...] that a turning point has been reached, whereby studies that incorporate substantive research on Turkey do, in fact, reach further conclusions than those which simply apply to Turkey: ones that do appeal to a wider scholarly community and increasingly help contribute to broader theoretical debates and disputes, all demonstrative of the fact that studies on Turkey do dynamically interact with numerous disciplines”.<sup>19</sup>

Responding to this call for interdisciplinarity, the present research does not aim to engage in any theoretical or disciplinary debate. Instead, it seeks to first operate a synthesis of existing valuable explanations and then to operate a historical reconstruction through different analytical frameworks. The objective is to adopt a critical approach to detect the parameters that have been contributing to shape dynamics of change in TFP, intended here as the outcome of inside-out dynamics that operate at three different levels: (1) international and regional; (2) domestic and institutional; (3) political leadership and public opinion. Based on all these premises, this research's structure and contents are built from a critical literature review. As the literature of Turkish politics and Turkish Foreign Policy is more than conspicuous, the objective is not primarily finding a specific gap within a particular strain of literature in terms of ontological or epistemological divisions. Instead, it is more intended as an effort to synthesize existing understandings to construct an anatomy of the phenomenon in a way that explains recent developments without avoiding a re-discussion of traditional categorization throughout a more profound historical account. To do so, the literature review is operated along three subsections. The first one deals with the origins and the pillars of TFP to detect the categories through which it has been studied but also how different disciplinary perspectives can converge (or diverge) in assessing the parameters and categories to determine the phenomenon. Focusing on the long period between the emergence of the Republic (1923) and the end of the Cold War, the section aims to demonstrate that, contrary to some traditional understandings in the literature, elements of continuity

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<sup>19</sup> Ciddi, S., & Levin, P. T. (2014). Interdisciplinarity and Comparison in Turkish Studies. *Turkish Studies*, 15(4), 568.

and change were already present throughout the evolutionary phases of TFP, even during times of an alleged “blind attachment to the West.”<sup>20</sup> In parallel, it seeks to provide the analytical tools to make sense of the different ways one can look at Turkey’s foreign policy, mainly intended as historical, material, or ideational-based accounts. The second subsection studies the literature referring to the post-Cold War era to see how changes in TFP have also prompted changes in the lenses through which the phenomenon has been interpreted, with a particular eye of attention on the rise of critical approaches and more flexible interdisciplinarity. Finally, the third subsection’s objective is to synthesize various approaches to locate this research and its guiding questions in the space created by a “third way,” aiming to avoid traditional epistemological, theoretical, and disciplinary discussions favoring multilayered holistic analysis of TFP.

However, before delving into this distinction, it is essential to clarify *how* Turkish Foreign Policy has been studied. To put it simply, the belief is that a critical approach helps deconstruct specific terminologies and parameters that, being taken for granted for a long time, have not only fallen short in explaining more recent changes but also obscured the nuances between continuities and ruptures in the historical formation of the Turkish state and, consequently, of TFP.

## 1.1. How to Study Turkish Foreign Policy

As recently recognized by a critical appraisal of the study of TFP, a suitable mode of deconstruction should aim at “decoding the embedded hierarchies, power relations, and political domestic contestations behind various foreign policy matters in Turkey.”<sup>21</sup> This is because categories like “geo-political truths, foreign policy traditions, national interests, and/or the identity regimes that differentiate inside and outside require further deconstruction in the light of a critical approach.”<sup>22</sup> Moving beyond conventional agency-structure debates in political theory, some authors agree that actors’ preferences often change together with their environments. It is even more critical that conditions and interests are neither foundational nor readily available to researchers or, most likely, to the actors themselves. Actors’ preferences and policies are conditioned by their multi-layered and complicated social, political, cultural, discursive, and economic contexts.

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<sup>20</sup> Abrami, S. C. A. (2024). Dal Bipolarismo a “The World is Bigger than Five”. L’impatto della Guerra Fredda sul (ri) posizionamento geopolitico della Turchia. In *Post. Sguardi sul Cambiamento*. Mimesis Edizioni; Leffler, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Erdoğan, B., & Hisarlıoğlu, F. (Eds.). (2022). *Critical Readings of Turkey’s Foreign Policy*. Springer International Publishing, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Idem.

In this sense, critical approaches do not formulate empirical theories or assume patterns in foreign policy easily. A critical approach “would seek to ask why a particular issue had been put forward as a problem to be solved in the first place.”<sup>23</sup> Instead of making generalizations about actors, they try to “understand” the thinking of different actors by zooming in on subjectivities and identities.<sup>24</sup> In this way, critical approaches open new venues for analyzing actors and their preferences and inform us about different ways of thinking in foreign policy-making.<sup>25</sup> As Peoples and Vaughan-Williams explain<sup>26</sup>, critical endeavors regularly question the idea of constant and permanently settled meanings and pre-given content. They do not arise from a vacuum, but they are generated by the social, political, economic, and cultural context from which they derive, and they take the possibility of change as a valuable assumption. In this vein, the complicated nature of political life opens paths to the possibilities of change, dynamism, and new imaginations. The commonalities that critical scholars find with each other do not lie in their methods and specific assumptions. Instead, they lie in their orientations. In this sense, being critical is an orientation rather than following a monolithic theory.<sup>27</sup>

Concerning the specific case of how Turkey’s sociopolitical dynamics have been traditionally studied, one can affirm that the history of critical writing in Turkish academia is quite old, especially in philosophy, sociology, history, law, political science, or public administration departments. However, regarding what has almost become the “sub-field of Turkish Foreign Policy studies,” such literature did not assume a central position until recently.<sup>28</sup> While critical scholars in other disciplines have contested the state and its institutions (such as the military and bureaucracy), criticized the condition of Turkish democracy and examined power relations in the world system, IR and foreign policy-oriented scripts remained essentially *state-* and *policy-*centric. To this day, most of this niche of the Turkish academic community maintains a mainstream position and pursues research on either empirical or theoretical matters without particular critical approaches or historical depth.<sup>29</sup> It is even more thought-provoking that this research is usually Turkey-centric, concentrated on Turkey’s

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<sup>23</sup> Edkins, J., & Zehfuss, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Global Politics: A New Introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, A. D. (2002). When is a Nation. *Geopolitics*, 7(2), 5–32.

<sup>25</sup> Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Peoples, C., & Vaughan-Williams, N. (2020). *Critical Security Studies: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

<sup>27</sup> Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022, 4.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed analyses and data, see Mehmetcik, H., Parlar Dal, E., & Haksas, H. (2024). Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy Studies: A Bibliometric Analysis. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*.

<sup>29</sup> Aydın, E., Aydın, M., Baran, E., Makarychev, A., Smith, K., Gözen, R., İpek, P., Kuru, D., Özdemir, H., Ersoy, E., Mallavarapu, S., Chen, C.-C., Köstem, S., Jörgensen, K. E., & Esen, B. (2018). Roundtable Discussion on Homegrown Theorizing. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*. For a comprehensive overview on recent data about Turkish academia, see Karamik, İ., & Ermihan, E. (2023). Quo Vadis, Turkish IR? Mapping Turkish IR’s Footsteps within the Global. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 12(2), 241–260.

foreign policy, neighbors, and interests, without questioning the background mechanism in decision-making and how they are linked with Turkey's nation-state formation process.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, in recent years, a small but growing group of academic researchers have sought to discuss foreign policy from the perspectives of critical approaches.<sup>31</sup> The contributions of these scholars are precious in that they question the aforementioned long-standing tradition in the Turkish IR community by challenging policy-oriented descriptive studies. With the help of the vast literature provided by disciplines like history, political science, and sociology, Turkey's new generation of scholars analyzed the various aspects of TFP. It started to deconstruct the notions of "state," "territory," and "identity", especially in two main directions: questioning the traditional framework of Turkey's relations with the West and Western institutions<sup>32</sup> and working on new paradigms to analyze dynamics of change and continuity<sup>33</sup> beyond relying exclusively on dichotomic categories such as Kemalist vs Islamist, or Western vs Islamist.<sup>34</sup>

Most importantly, political changes taking place in Turkey after 2002 with the rise of the AKP provided extensive material for such research.<sup>35</sup> Scholarly discussions have used the exploratory tools and conceptual frameworks of critical constructivist and post-structuralist approaches, enriching

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<sup>30</sup> Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Arkan, Z., & Kinacıoğlu, M. (2016). Enabling 'ambitious activism': Davutoğlu's vision of a new foreign policy identity for Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 17(3), 381–405; Ataç, C. A. (2019). Pax Ottomanica No More! The "Peace" Discourse in Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Davutoğlu Era and the Prolonged Syrian Crisis. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 28(1), 48–69; Bilgiç, A. (2016). *Turkey, power and the West: Gendered international relations and foreign policy*. I.B. Tauris; Gülsah Çapan, Z., & Zarakol, A. (2019). Turkey's ambivalent self: Ontological insecurity in 'Kemalism' versus 'Erdoğanism.' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(3), 263–282; Cebeci, M. (2019). Deconstructing the EU's "Standards of Civilisation": The Case of Turkey. *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations*, 16(64), 77–91; Aydın-Düzgüt, S., Rumelili, B., & Gülmez, S. B. (2020). Turkey as a Model for the Mediterranean? Revealing Discursive Continuities with Europe's Imperial Past. *Interventions*, 22(6), 741–762; Rumelili, B. (2012). Liminal identities and processes of domestication and subversion in International Relations. *Review of International Studies*, 38(2), 495–508; Alpan, B. (2014). 'Europe-as-Hegemony' and Discourses in Turkey after 1999: What has 'Europeanization' Got to Do with It? *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 16(1), 68–85; Rumelili, B., & Çelik, A. B. (2017). Ontological insecurity in asymmetric conflicts: Reflections on agonistic peace in Turkey's Kurdish issue. *Security Dialogue*, 48(4), 279–296; Rumelili, B., & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, R. (2017). Brand Turkey: Liminal Identity and its Limits. *Geopolitics*, 22(3), 549–570; Uzer, U. (2021). Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy: What Can International Relations Theory Offer? *The Review of International Affairs*, 72(1181), 5–22; Yanık, L. K., & Hisarlıoğlu, F. (2019). They wrote history with their bodies': Necrogeopolitics, Necropolitical Spaces and the Everyday Spatial Politics of Death in Turkey. In B. Bargu, *Turkey's Necropolitical Laboratory* (pp. 46–70). Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Alpan, 2014; Cebeci, 2019; Bilgin, P. (2009). Securing Turkey through western-oriented foreign policy. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 40, 103–123; Çınar, M. (2018). Turkey's 'Western' or 'Muslim' identity and the AKP's civilizational discourse. *Turkish Studies*, 19(2), 176–197.

<sup>33</sup> Kaliber, A., & Aydın-Düzgüt, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Is Turkey de-Europeanising?: Encounters with Europe in a candidate country*. Routledge.; Kaliber, A., & Kaliber, E. (2019). From De-Europeanisation to Anti-Western Populism: Turkish Foreign Policy in Flux. *The International Spectator*, 54(4), 1–16; Kara, M., & Sözen, A. (2016). Change and continuity in Turkish foreign policy: Evaluating pre-AKP and AKP periods' national role conceptions. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 13(52), 47–66.

<sup>34</sup> Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022, 11. See also Hintz, L. (2018). *Identity politics inside out: National identity contestation and foreign policy in Turkey*. Oxford university press; Zarakol, A. (2013). Revisiting Second Image Reversed: Lessons from Turkey and Thailand: Revisiting Second Image Reversed. *International Studies Quarterly*, 57(1), 150–162; Tellal, E. (2005). Türk Dış Politikası'nda Avrasya Seçeneği. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 2(5), 49–70; Aslan, A. (2013). Problematizing modernity in Turkish foreign policy: Identity, sovereignty and beyond. *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, 9(33), 27–58.

<sup>35</sup> Altunışık, M. B., & Martin, L. G. (2011). Making sense of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East under AKP. *Turkish Studies*, 12(4), 569–587; Öniş, Z., & Yılmaz, Ş. (2009). Between Europeanization and Euro-asianism: Foreign policy activism in Turkey during the AKP era. *Turkish Studies*, 10(1), 7–24; Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 88(2), 243–270; Kırdış, E. (2015). The role of foreign policy in constructing the party identity of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP). *Turkish Studies*, 16(2), 178–194;



scholarly debates by introducing new discussions on Turkey's long-term ontological insecurities<sup>36</sup>, the country's liminal foreign policy identity<sup>37</sup>, and the impact of this identity on both Turkish foreign policy behavior and securitization in Turkish foreign and domestic politics.<sup>38</sup> Ontologically, albeit mostly state-centrally, these studies investigate the "state" as a hegemonic project with complex discursive, sociological, and historically constructed layers and numerous identity crises.<sup>39</sup> As such, understanding the state becomes a political, historical, and genealogical endeavor. Such research locates Turkey at the intersection of a variety of forces, ranging from ideational to hegemonic and from structural to ontological. Unlike mainstream realist and liberal research explaining Turkey as a rational unit causing (usually material) changes in its environment, an innovative strain of research should not "take any a priori formula as a given for a state's actions."<sup>40</sup> A state is seen as an ever-changing and unstable institution that constantly interacts with others in its environment.

This new tendency to "go beyond categories" is well described in recent works by Toni Alaranta.<sup>41</sup> In his books, he investigates the representation of competing ideological traditions and expressions of national identity that have been central in Turkey's transformation, including their linkages to the international system, as analyzed from a broader and more multidisciplinary perspective than just an IR-based one. Alaranta clearly states the objective should provide a more profound historical framing and a more rigorous analysis of historical contexts. Regarding how Turkey has been studied, he is provocative in calling for a more thorough attempt "to move beyond the so-called 'post-Kemalist paradigm' in interpretations of Turkish domestic politics."<sup>42</sup>

In brief, the paradigm within which many existing studies on Turkey's transformed domestic and foreign policies have approached their subject could be broadly described as "post-Kemalist." This is the overall perspective from which Turkey's domestic transformation has been interpreted as

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<sup>36</sup> Among others, Gülsah Çapan & Zarakol, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Yanık, L. K. (2011). Constructing Turkish "exceptionalism": Discourses of liminality and hybridity in post-Cold War Turkish foreign policy. *Political Geography*, 30(2), 80–89; Yanık, L. K. (2011). Constructing Turkish "exceptionalism": Discourses of liminality and hybridity in post-Cold War Turkish foreign policy. *Political Geography*, 30(2), 80–89.

<sup>38</sup> Kardaş, T., & Balci, A. (2016). Inter-societal security trilemma in Turkey: Understanding the failure of the 2009 Kurdish Opening. *Turkish Studies*, 17(1), 155–180; Kardaş, T., & Balci, A. (2019). Understanding the July 2016 Military Coup: The Contemporary Security Dilemma in Turkey. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 28(1), 144–163; Bilgin, P. (2005). Turkey's changing security discourses: The challenge of globalisation. *European Journal of Political Research*, 44(1), 175–201; Bilgin, P. (2018). Sacralisation: Defying the Politicisation of Security in Turkey. *European Review of International Studies*, 5(3), 94–114; Çakmak, H. (Ed.). (2016). *Cumhurbaşkanları ve dış politika* (1. Baskı). Kripto; Coş, K., & Bilgin, P. (2010). Stalin's Demands: Constructions of the "Soviet Other" in Turkey's Foreign Policy, 1919–1945. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 6(1), 43–60; Demirtas-Bagdonas, Ö. (2014). Reading Turkey's Foreign Policy on Syria: The AKP's Construction of a Great Power Identity and the Politics of Grandeur. *Turkish Studies*, 15(1), 139–155; Aghaie Joobani, H., & Adisönmez, U. C. (2018). Turkey's Volte-Face Politics: Understanding the AKP's Securitization Policy toward the Syrian Conflict. *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 8(1).

<sup>39</sup> Hintz, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Alaranta, T. (2015). National and state identity in Turkey: The transformation of the Republic's status in the international system. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Alaranta, T. (2022). Turkey's Foreign Policy Narratives: Implications of Global Power Shifts. Springer International Publishing.

<sup>42</sup> Alaranta 2022, 22. For a discussion, see Szurek, E., & Türesay, Ö. (2022). Post-Kemalism and Its Discontents. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 35; Aytürk, İ., & Esen, B. (Eds.). (2022). *Post-post-Kemalizm: Türkiye çalışmalarında yeni arayışlar*. İletişim.

the emergence of material and ideational social forces, also anticipated in academic writings through which Kemalist convictions about state-building, national identity formulation, and the modernization project were largely abandoned. Moreover, since the 1980s, the post-Kemalist paradigm has envisioned a transformative path emphasizing the democratic potential of the social forces that the Kemalist center had thus far marginalized. This understanding was most clearly manifest vocally in the Turkish liberals' view of the AKP and the Islamic-conservative constituencies as some "natural force" capable of tame or even completely unmaking the authoritarian state. Thus, in the first years of the 2000s, the post-Kemalist paradigm more or less coincided with the rise of the AKP as a liberalizing and democratizing force.

One could see this at play, for instance, in Atasoy's book<sup>43</sup>, published just before the authoritarian turn of the AKP. Later, as the AKP rule under the leadership of the then Prime Minister and now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan turned increasingly authoritarian and exclusive, this symbiosis naturally ended. However, at least thus far, this has not resulted in any systematic re-evaluation of the post-Kemalist paradigm, nor has it produced a new dominant approach, defined by Aytürk and Esen as a post-post-Kemalist paradigm.<sup>44</sup> However, the aim of a new strain of research should neither necessarily nor automatically purport to provide such a new paradigm but rather to analyze some of the main political processes of Republican Turkey – and even of the late Ottoman Empire – to question and challenge some of the core assumptions inherent in the post-Kemalist approach. For instance, Alaranta states, "A long-term historical analysis can function as the ideological-historical backdrop against which to analyze current foreign policy narratives." In general, it has the potential to provide "a much-needed context for Turkey's increasingly active and perplexing foreign policy in the age of a global power shift."<sup>45</sup>

## 1.2. Two necessary premises

Placed at the center of a transcontinental geographic space, projecting from the Balkans to the heart of the Middle East, extending from the Black Sea to the Caucasus, and affected as much by the

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<sup>43</sup> Atasoy, Y. (2009). *Islam's marriage with neo-liberalism: State transformation in Turkey* (p. viii). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

<sup>44</sup> Aytürk & Esen, 2023. As Aytürk rightly noted, authoritarianism in Turkey did not start with Kemalism, and neither has it ended with the replacement of the Kemalists by the AKP. On authoritarianism in Turkey, see, for example, Esen, B., & Gumuscu, S. (2016). Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(9), 1581–1606; Çalışkan, K. (2018). Toward a new political regime in Turkey: From competitive toward full authoritarianism. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 58, 5–33; Somer, M. (2016). Understanding Turkey's democratic breakdown: Old vs. new and indigenous vs. global authoritarianism. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 481–503.

<sup>45</sup> Alaranta, 2022, 10.

currents of the Mediterranean as by those of the Persian Gulf, the Republic of Turkey presents itself on the international chessboard as a country that is historically characterized by multiple identities. Likewise, as a global actor, it is marked by peculiar categorizations, complex sociopolitical dynamics, and evolutionary phases along its centenary history. While countless scholars over the decades have argued that Turkey's geography determines its foreign and security policies<sup>46</sup>, many others have underscored that the Ottoman Empire's legacy is not just detectable in cultural and social questions but also in Turkey's foreign and security policymaking.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, bearing in mind that "an analysis of a country's foreign policy in the *long durée* is ultimately an exercise of locating that country on the world history map"<sup>48</sup>, two main premises are necessary to understand how the historical features and original pillars of TFP have been interpreted.

First, a recurrent question in the literature revolves around geography and asks how to position Turkey in global politics. Stressing the geographical aspect in a quasi-deterministic way, some authors have noted that "if geopolitics and geography represent the *Deus ex machina* of any explanation of the geopolitical vision elaborated by leaders"<sup>49</sup>, it becomes evident how the political preferences and strategic choices Turkey has elaborated over time are the results of the dynamics and consequences arising from its location.<sup>50</sup> From this perspective – sometimes referred to as civilizational geopolitics – the location of Turkey originates a dual matter in which classical geopolitics (its position in terms of location) and critical geopolitics (its position in terms of role) operate.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, both dimensions would help explain Turkey's mode of action, its lease status, and its various roles in the international order. Even outside the pure geopolitical camp, Turkey has constantly been located "in-between," represented with metaphors of "bridge," "gate," and "cross-road."<sup>52</sup> Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis pushed this tendency to the extreme by describing civilizational orientation as an essential but largely static informer of foreign policy.

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<sup>46</sup> Dominian, L. (1916). Europe at Turkey's Door. *Geographical Review*, 1(4), 286; Sander, O. (1984). Turkish Foreign Policy: Forces of Continuity and of Change. In A. Evin (Ed.), *Modern Turkey: Continuity and Change* (pp. 115–130). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften; Kelly, J. M. (1971). Bridge across the Bosphorus: The Foreign Policy of Turkey. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 24(3), 608–609.

<sup>47</sup> Heper, M. (2000). The Ottoman Legacy and Turkish Politics. *Journal of International Affairs (New York)*, 54(1), 63–82; Karaosmanoğlu, A. L. (2000). The evolution of the national security culture and the military in Turkey. *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), 199–216; Walker, J. (2009). Turkey's Imperial Legacy: Understanding Contemporary Turkey through its Ottoman Past. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 8(2–3), 494–508.

<sup>48</sup> Altunışık, M. B. (2023). The trajectory of a modified middle power: An attempt to make sense of Turkey's foreign policy in its centennial. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 658.

<sup>49</sup> Tuathail, G. Ó. (1994). (Dis)placing Geopolitics: Writing on the Maps of Global Politics. *Environment and Planning. D, Society & Space*, 12(5), 525–546.

<sup>50</sup> Yeşiltaş, M. (2013). The Transformation of the Geopolitical Vision in Turkish Foreign Policy. *Turkish Studies*, 14(4), 672.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Yanık, L. K. (2009). The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: "Bridging" Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War. *Geopolitics*, 14(3), 531–549.

Within this framework, Turkey falls into the category of those “torn countries [that are] divided over whether their society belongs to one civilization or another [and where] their leaders typically wish to pursue a bandwagon strategy and to make their countries members of the West, but the history, culture, and traditions of their countries are non-Western.”<sup>53</sup> In the same vein, Turkey has been described by others as a country with “ambivalent ties to Europe”<sup>54</sup> as well as an “in-between”<sup>55</sup> and “hybrid”<sup>56</sup> place which is “impossible to categorize.”<sup>57</sup>

Discussions about Turkey’s “in-betweenness” have also expanded to critical studies. Among all, Rumelili and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm refute these reductionist and simplistic categorizations and note that attempts to locate the country through identity predicaments “stem not from Turkey’s physical location *per se*, but from the ways in which the geographical categories of the East and the West have been associated with the tradition/modernity, barbarism/civilization and authenticity/corruption binaries in “orientalist and occidentalist geopolitical discourses.”<sup>58</sup> Likewise, academic studies on TFP have utilized concepts such as multiple identities, hybridity,<sup>59</sup> marginality, cusp state<sup>60</sup>, and liminality<sup>61</sup> to capture the implications of Turkey’s in-between position in terms of policymaking.

Though all these studies highlight Turkey’s historical and/or geographical “uniqueness,” they take these features as given. Rumelili notes that liminality is not Turkey’s “inherent trait, but a contextual product of specific discourses on international politics.”<sup>62</sup> On this verve, more elaborate analyses have recently emerged, pointing to the unsettled nature of historical and geographical features in the context of Turkish foreign policy discourse. While Aydın highlights the “securitization of history and geography,”<sup>63</sup> Tank<sup>64</sup> mentioned the “manipulation of history and geography for creating a unique image.” Bilgin also underlines Turkey’s recent claim for “interstitiality and

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<sup>53</sup> Huntington, S. P. (2011). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (Simon&Schuster hardcover ed). Simon & Schuster, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Müftüler-Bac, M. (2004). Turkey’s Accession to the European Union: Institutional and Security Challenges. *Perceptions*, 31.

<sup>55</sup> Robins, K. (2011). Interrupting Identities: Turkey/Europe. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 61–86). SAGE Publications Ltd, 65-66.

<sup>56</sup> Diez, T. (2005). Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering ‘Normative Power Europe’. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33(3), 633.

<sup>57</sup> Müftüler-Bac, M. (1998). The never-ending story: Turkey and the European Union. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34(4), 248.

<sup>58</sup> Rumelili & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2017, 550; Similar concepts drawn from Said, E. W. (2014). *Orientalism* (25. anniversary edition with a new preface by the author). Vintage Books Edition and Buruma, I., & Margalit, A. (2005). *Occidentalism: The West in the eyes of its enemies* (2. print). Penguin Books.

<sup>59</sup> Yanik, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Altunışık, M. B. (2014). Geopolitical representation of Turkey’s cuspsness. In M. Herzog & P. Robins (Eds.), *The role, position and agency of Cusp States in international relations* (First published). Routledge.

<sup>61</sup> Rumelili, 2012; Yanik, 2011, note 5.

<sup>62</sup> Rumelili, 2012, 505.

<sup>63</sup> Aydın, M. (2003). Securitization of History and Geography: Understanding of Security in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 3(2), 163–184.

<sup>64</sup> Tank, P. (2006). Dressing for the Occasion: Reconstructing Turkey’s Identity? *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 6(4), 464.

cosmopolitanism.”<sup>65</sup> What they share is the idea that both the Republic of Turkey and Turkish society are historical creations of an extensive definition of security, which evolved from – and is affected by – historical experiences.

Building on these approaches, recognizing that Turkey’s location provides benefits and vulnerabilities simultaneously, Yanık underscores how this has contributed to the construction of Turkey’s exceptionalism by its political elites. She states that “the hybridization of geography is constructed by various discursive practices that portray Turkey as a meeting place of different regions and continents.”<sup>66</sup> Turkey, in other words, is portrayed as belonging to two different continents and containing the features of both. At the same time, the hybridization of history means that “Turkey’s past, especially its multiethnic and multireligious Ottoman past, is remembered and represented in a multicultural way.”<sup>67</sup> In other words, Turkey’s history, geography and thus its liminal status are thereby presented as exceptional in world politics.

Related to this exceptionality is a second necessary premise, which pertains to the hitches in defining the exact role of Turkey as a player in global politics. Indeed, TFP appears to have been swinging on a pendulum between firm foundational pillars and their contestation/revision in multiple ways and by the hands of various actors from time to time. That is because locating a country in foreign policy terms “is not generally only a reflection of an objective reality but also a subjective process that entails debates and clashes among different actors.”<sup>68</sup> This is evident because the historical heritage has resulted in aspirations for equality, greatness, prestige, and apprehension towards external threats and domestic minority groups. This legacy also encompasses a longstanding tradition of “balancing” for security. It emerged as a hallmark of Ottoman diplomacy in the late eighteenth century amidst its waning military and economic power but persisted into the Republican era. Another question revolves around “restoration.” While Turkey is not a post-colonial nation, it is a post-imperial one. This means that, despite avoidance of complete colonization by Western powers, it endured semi-colonialism, unequal treaties, invasions, and territorial losses, leaving profound impacts on policymakers. As argued by Bora and as one can quickly note nowadays, this fuels a strong inclination among the Turkish right, encompassing nationalists and Islamists, toward restoration.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, even within Kemalist circles, the pursuit of restoration is acknowledged not merely as a theme but as a problematic issue. Primarily, this trauma has influenced

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<sup>65</sup> Bilgin, 2009, 121.

<sup>66</sup> Yanık, 2011, 80.

<sup>67</sup> Idem.

<sup>68</sup> Altunışık, 2023, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Bora, T. (2017). *Türk sağının üç hâli milliyetçilik, muhafazakârlık, İslamcılık* (10. baskı). Birikim Kitapları, 17.

Turkey's relations with the West, where the founding of the Republic involved both resistance against and aspirations for integration with Western powers, rooted in historical trajectories and the aspiration for autonomy, sovereignty, and influence within a Western-dominated global order.<sup>70</sup> Yet, ambivalence toward the West persists, along with essentialization, otherization, and suspicion regarding its intentions toward Turkey.

Secondly, the Ottoman Empire's demise engendered acute sensitivity regarding territoriality, sovereignty, and international standing, profoundly shaping Turkey's interactions with its neighbors and the world. While these legacies have molded TFP, the foreign policies of its neighbors have also been influenced by them. Falih Rifki Atay's book "*Zeytindağı*" (Olive Mountain) offers valuable insight into how the new Turkish elite viewed the past and envisioned the future. Atay critiques the Ottoman presence outside Anatolia, particularly in the Middle East, as a futile and wasteful endeavor. He attributes the deteriorating situation in Anatolia to the Ottoman Empire, accusing it of depleting Anatolia's resources in the Arab deserts. Turkey's new intellectual movement favored a Western government and secularism model, advocating for a future that distanced itself from Turkey's Ottoman and Islamic past.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the nation-state-based geographical imagination of the new Kemalist elite arose from consolidating the nation-state territories, fostering a well-defined sense of homeland in strict territorial terms, and emphasizing the "Turkification" of all Muslim elements within Anatolia's remnants of the Ottoman Empire. This is evident even when looking at some declarations by Mustafa Kemal. For instance, he told his French interviewer on October 29th, 1923: "The happiest era of our History was when our Sultans were not Caliphs,"<sup>72</sup> stressing that the Turks should realize that they were no longer the arbiter of the world and that they had tossed blood only for their liberation and not in remote areas any longer as in the past.<sup>73</sup> One can, thus, say that this regional rhetoric was constructed on the premise that the homeland was constantly threatened and surrounded by enemies. The official nationalist discourse maintained a sensitive and narrowly defined concept of the homeland, deliberately avoiding ultra-nationalist ideologies referencing external territories. This approach enabled policymakers to create a strong sense of defending the homeland, garner domestic support, and maintain their grip on power.<sup>74</sup> This implies that "although the distance remains the same, the perception of these geographies [can change] under the premises of a new geographical imagination."<sup>75</sup> The physical distance and prior difficulties of getting involved in these

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<sup>70</sup> Zarakol, A. (2011). *After defeat: How the East learned to live with the West* (1. publ). Cambridge University Press, 146.

<sup>71</sup> Atay, F. R. (2010). *Zeytindağı* (Repr.). Pozitif Yayınları.

<sup>72</sup> Arsan, N., Borak, S., & Kocatürk, U. (Eds.). (1997). *Atatürk'ün söylev ve demeçleri* (4. bs). Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 70.

<sup>73</sup> Türk Devrim Tarihi Enstitüsü. (1952). *NUTUK*. Türk Devrim Tarihi Enstitüsü; Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 711-12.

<sup>74</sup> Aras, B., & Bacik, G. (2000). The rise of nationalist action party and Turkish politics. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 6(4), 48-64.

<sup>75</sup> Aras, B. (2009). Turkey's rise in the Greater Middle East: Peace-building in the periphery. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 11(1), 34.

geographies can mutate their significance in policy circles and among the public. There emerges a process of discovering the “closeness” of these geographies and “availability” for Turkey’s involvement through remembering past relations, unfolding cultural and civilizational affinities, and exploring opportunities for engagement. Hence, the Ottoman period’s historical legacy plays a dual role, shaping Turkey’s worldview and affecting how the world perceives Turkey, thereby undergoing continual construction and reconstruction over time in an interactive fashion.<sup>76</sup>

However, it is essential to note that the way Turkey has historically placed and conceived itself in world politics is not just a matter of conceptual elements but also actual material capabilities depending on factors like economic, military, and demographic power. As will be further discussed in the following sections, Turkey has traditionally been considered a middle/regional power in terms of its place in global politics since its establishment.<sup>77</sup> This leads to considering the empirical aspects of its liminality because neither the structure nor the characteristics of Turkey’s agency are always constraining and deterministic. On the contrary, they have sometimes opened up possibilities for Turkey to capitalize on such characteristics. In contrast, foreign policy choices have also eased its in-betweenness at other times.<sup>78</sup> This means that, while not in the class of great powers, Turkey played a role on the international stage potentially greater than its demographic, economic, and military size would otherwise have allowed.<sup>79</sup> In this sense, its long-standing membership in NATO, active participation in most international organizations, and candidacy path to the EU demonstrate how its political involvement and exposed position assign it importance that is hardly matched by any other middle power.<sup>80</sup> However, one could argue that, especially in its early years, Turkey did not fit into what is considered the material basis of being a middle power, namely military and economic

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<sup>76</sup> Palabiyik, M. S. (2018). Politicization of recent Turkish history: (Ab)use of history as a political discourse in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 19(2), 240–263.

<sup>77</sup> Kubicek, P., Dal, E. P., & Oğuzlu, H. T. (Eds.). (2016). *Turkey’s Rise as an Emerging Power* (0 ed.). Routledge.

<sup>78</sup> Altunışık, 2023, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Aydın, M. (1999). Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Historical Framework and Traditional Inputs. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(4), 152.

<sup>80</sup> Idem. For clarity, this project refers to Turkey as a regional power/middle power interchangeably, without entering the taxonomy debate. Notwithstanding other debates around the terminology and classification, I follow Kubicek et al. (2016)’s application for the concept to the case of Turkey. In brief, she draws on two main definitions. According to Carr (2014), three main variables can help identify a middle power: position, behavior, and identity. Position refers to the material factors and capabilities, such as GDP, military might, and population. It can also include other factors like geography, strategic position, and proximity. Behavior refers to the diplomatic behavior of the nation. The concept of leadership within a regional and international context, according to Cooper and Flemes (2013), involves several key factors. Firstly, it encompasses a state’s involvement in regional and international organizations, its crucial role in managing crises and mediating disputes, and a clear regional commitment reflected in its foreign policy and political leadership’s rhetoric. Secondly, the capacity to exert influence over neighboring countries is determined by both tangible and intangible assets. Tangible assets include military capabilities, economic indicators like GDP and competitiveness, demographic factors, and the Human Development Index. On the other hand, intangible assets relate to a state’s perceived authority, legitimacy, and credibility. See Carr, A. (2014). Is Australia a middle power? A systemic impact approach. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68(1), 70–84; Cooper, A. F., & Flemes, D. (2013). Foreign Policy Strategies of Emerging Powers in a Multipolar World: An introductory review. *Third World Quarterly*, 34(6), 943–962.

indicators. Yet, the country was regarded as such about middle power behavior, namely preferring multilateralism and diplomacy and engaging in regional cooperative schemes. This conceptualization of seeming exceptionality (or anomaly), in fact, points to some critical characteristics of Turkey as an actor in international politics, thus making it what Altunışık calls a “modified middle power.”<sup>81</sup>

Therefore, to make sense of these peculiarities, the following paragraphs will try to provide a historical account of TFP through the different interpretative categories and disciplinary lenses that scholars have applied.

### 1.3. From the Republic to the post-Cold War (1923-1989)

#### 1.3.1. The Kemalist Paradigm

Although there has been no shortage of fluctuations since the beginning of Turkey’s republican era (1923), scholars mostly agree on the fact that the country’s strategic vision and elaboration of foreign policy are strongly linked to the demise, the legacy, and the sociopolitical structures of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>82</sup> an explicit agreement is also present in the identification of the cornerstones of Turkey’s foreign policy behavior: an isolationist logic translated into defensive foreign policy practices, a cautious activism mainly confined to multilateral diplomacy towards the West, strategic discourses shaped by the new elite’s fears related to territorial integrity; identity dilemmas for the domestic, regional, and global context.<sup>83</sup> Emblematic in this regard is the fact that the definition of national security by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs – expressed as “the condition of being protected from or not being exposed to danger”<sup>84</sup> – has remained tied to a three-dimensional concept of self-preservation: ensuring the survival of the population, the protection of

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<sup>81</sup> Altunışık, 2023, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Hale, 2012; Sander, 1984; Balci, 2013; Kürkçüoğlu, 1980; Oran, B. (2002). *Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1980)*. İletişim Yayınları.; For a more critical and historical perspective, see Zarakol, A. (2021). Linking Up The Ottoman Empire with Ir’s Timeline. In B. De Carvalho, J. Costa Lopez, & H. Leira (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations* (1st ed., pp. 464–476). Routledge; Danforth, N. (2021). *The Remaking of Republican Turkey: Memory and Modernity since the Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press; Feroz, A. (2005). The Late Ottoman Empire. In M. Kent (Ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (2nd ed). Taylor and Francis; Altuğ, Y. (1989). Foreign Policy of Atatürk. *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 6(16), 39-46; Cooper, M. (2002). The legacy of Atatürk: Turkish political structures and policy-making. *International Affairs*, 78(1), 115-128.

<sup>83</sup> “Among the foundational works serving as cornerstones in the realm of TFP scholarship is the pioneering contribution of Mehmet Gönülöbol, whose meticulous research has been fundamental in understanding TFP intricacies. Oran’s comprehensive three-volume work stands out as a primary scholarly reference. Additionally, scholars such as William Hale and Ali Balci have made significant contributions, providing valuable insights into Turkey’s foreign policy realm. Gönülöbol, M. (1992). Atatürk ve Dış Politika. *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 8(24), 439–442; Oran, 2002; Hale, 2012; Balci, 2013.

<sup>84</sup> This was related to the last time the author consulted the website in 2021. It is interesting to note that there have been slight wording changes later. See it at [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/i\\_-turkiye\\_s-security-perspective\\_-historical-and-conceptual-background\\_-turkiye\\_s-contributions.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/i_-turkiye_s-security-perspective_-historical-and-conceptual-background_-turkiye_s-contributions.en.mfa).



territorial integrity, and the preservation of the identity at the foundation of the nation. These seemingly antithetical conceptions have instead converged equally within Turkish strategic thinking and, while conforming to alterations that have occurred in the country's various historical phases, their influence on strategies, perceptions, and decisions throughout the twentieth century has remained significant.

However, it is essential to recognize that the same numerous elements that informed the formative years of the Turkish state and society also contributed to shaping different aspects of the decision and foreign policy making: an evolving perception of history and geography leading to different liminal identities; a complex process of state-formation leaving room for structural societal cleavages; a strong and centralized bureaucracy with a prominent role for the military; the need to adapt and elaborate foreign policy strategies according to two main principles, namely a desire to grow as a powerful nation-state while at the same time maintain a cautious (or later opportunistic) approach towards neighboring regions.

Many historical accounts traditionally devoted their attention to making sense of the conceptualization of Turkey's strategic culture. For instance, the historian and political scientist Baskın Oran considers TFP driven by several structural factors. First, cultural factors include the fact that Turkish society enjoys a powerful Asian cultural component with its implication on views on the world, power, and state. The same goes for Islamic legacy and worldview. Ulman and Sander also define aspiration for the Western standards of living and Westernization of politics and institutions as a significant factor from the late Ottoman to the republican era.<sup>85</sup> In general, they emphasize this historical dimension to show how the secularization efforts initiated in the Ottoman Empire and the nation-building modernization policy implemented from above permanently affected the decision-making process in TFP. Finally, a strategic factor mainly deals with Turkey's geopolitical situation between major political, economic, and cultural areas, making Turkey a significant international player and, therefore, affects its foreign policy by simultaneously introducing unique opportunities and challenges.<sup>86</sup>

Besides structural elements, other authors embrace ideational or constructivist lenses<sup>87</sup> to read the formation of Turkey's strategic culture. As such, some argue that Turkey's status of ambivalence, dictated by constantly being defined as "not fully Western and not fully Eastern either," creates a

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<sup>85</sup> Ulman, H., & Sander, O. (1972). *Türk Dış Politikasına Yön Veren Etkenler*. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi; Dergi Park, 27-29.

<sup>86</sup> Oran 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Although not completely overlapping, this research will refer to constructivism as a theoretical approach and to ideational as a more general approach that studies TFP through the examination of immaterial factors like ideas, ideologies, and perceptions.

sense of “ontological insecurity.”<sup>88</sup> To put it simply, this refers to the fact that TFP has been incessantly affected by the perception, inherent among decision-makers as much as at the popular level, that the international arena remains hostile and that foreign countries, including the allies themselves, pose a potential security threat.<sup>89</sup> This helps to capture how the heavy cultural and historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire, together with the political consequences of its territorial disintegration, have left strong imprints on the country’s national philosophy and the character of its people<sup>90</sup>, to the point of creating what has been described as “a perpetual insecurity complex and a national security syndrome.”<sup>91</sup> As a result, every presumed or actual source of regional and international instability has traditionally been filtered through a “geopolitical anxiety,” also known as the “Sèvres syndrome.”<sup>92</sup>

Other than perceptions of the external environment, self-definitions and self-perceptions of state identity can be seen as fundamental factors influencing TFP. For instance, a nuanced work by Erol and Ozan delves into the issue of how the political regime in Turkey and its characteristics can be regarded as one of the determinants.<sup>93</sup> They base their evaluation on a historicist and constructivist approach that sees foreign policy formulated according to how political regimes define themselves, see their place in the international system, and finally perceive the outside world. Ulman and Sander note that political elites responsible for foreign policy serve as a conduit for particular societal worldviews and values to influence decision-making.<sup>94</sup> They argue that the security-based foreign policy conduct for many years was promoted by the Kemalist elites, whose personalities and ideological worldviews were shaped by the traumatic demise of the Ottoman state, decades-long wars (1877-1920), and the War of Independence (1919-1923) when hostile foreign powers were trying to dismember the Turkish state using every possible opportunity to inflict instability inside the Turkish society.<sup>95</sup>

From an empirical point of view, it is evident that Turkey’s pro-Western reforms, in concert, framed the newly established Republic’s foreign policy to create a secular nation-state. The founding fathers implemented Westernizing reforms to shape the state and society under Kemalist ideology. According to Robins, most of the existence of the Turkish republic, domestic politics, and foreign

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<sup>88</sup> Rumelili, 2012, 505.

<sup>89</sup> Bilgin, 2005, 183.

<sup>90</sup> Aydın, 1999, 156.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted from statements by former Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz, in *Milliyet* (archives), August 7, 2001.

<sup>92</sup> Mufti, 2009, 43

<sup>93</sup> Erol, M. S., & Ozan, E. (2011). Türk Dış Politikasında Süreklilik Unsuru Olarak Siyasal Rejim. *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 4(8), 13–38.

<sup>94</sup> Ulman & Sander, 1972, 208.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 50-61.

policy alike have been dominated by a “Kemalist political orthodoxy.”<sup>96</sup> In his view, when the Turkish ethnic-nationalists took power at the end of World War I, they turned their backs on two potential options: an expansionist, ultranationalist vision of Turkey under the banner of pan-Turanism and what they saw as a backward-looking Islamic-inspired regime, the likes of which had, in the form of the Ottoman Empire, just collapsed, but which they might have attempted to reconstruct. Instead, they opted for a third way: Turkey was to become a territorially fixed nation-state based on a shared Turkish national identity and secular (or more appropriately laicist, or French secular) values. Therefore, Kemalism did not remain confined to an ideology but took the concrete form of solid-state structures aimed at ruling Turkish society, an amalgam of diverse ethnic, religious, and ideological groups.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, the 1920s and 1930s represented a period of building and, at the same time, protecting the state. This was particularly challenging due to the difficulties of transitioning from an empire to a nation-state and considering the extent of the reforms and transformations in a context of extreme economic and social weakness.<sup>98</sup> However, as many noted, Turkey’s internal and external dimensions were already strongly linked in the sense that, during the first two decades of the Republic, its foreign policy became an extension of its domestic Westernizing reforms. Consequently, the Kemalist worldview, guided by its first President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s dictum “Peace at Home, Peace in the World,” provided an operational action map for the Foreign Ministry’s bureaucracy.<sup>99</sup> In this regard, Okutan and Ereker touch upon the Kemalist legacy in TFP to draw a connection between the political regime’s logic, ideals, and foreign policy. In brief, they affirm that Atatürk’s attempts to create a nation and modernize Turkish society under a constricted and hostile environment created a peculiar foreign policy marked with cautious activity outside national borders, distrust of the neighboring countries, and a security-based approach to foreign policy dilemma solving.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, Erpul argues that, due to historical experiences, Turkish decision-makers had long had a security-centric and statist *Weltanschauung*, according to which international politics were seen primarily in conflictual terms. As a result, Turkey had been displaying a defensive and refrained

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<sup>96</sup> Robins, P. (2007). Turkish Foreign Policy since 2002: Between a “Post-Islamist” Government and a Kemalist State. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 83(2), 289–304.

<sup>97</sup> Aydın, 1999, 154–56.

<sup>98</sup> Hale, 2012, 54.

<sup>99</sup> Cooper, 2002; Hale, W. (2023). *The Political and Economic Development of Modern Turkey* (1st ed.). Routledge; Ahmad, F. (2000). *The making of modern Turkey* (Repr). Routledge. For a view on the military’s perspective, see Narli, N. (2000). Civil-military relations in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 1(1), 107–127.

<sup>100</sup> Okutan, C., & Ereker, F. (n.d.). Türk Dış Politikasının Belirlenmesinde “Rejim” Unsuru. 4(8), 192–194.

foreign policy posture for years, mostly aligned with its Western allies and cautious towards neighboring countries.<sup>101</sup>

Another inside-out perspective to look at TFP is related to the dynamics of rupture and continuity concerning the agents participating in the change process. Indeed, many authors stress that no total rupture can be traced between the Ottoman Empire and the newly established Republic in terms of state mechanisms and concrete foreign policy strategies.<sup>102</sup> This reflection might be drawn to the question of the positioning and spatiality of power relations within the modern state. Zubaida proposes rethinking statehood according to the concept of the “political field.”<sup>103</sup> Accordingly, while the end of the Ottoman Empire and the completion of the regional composition in a “colonial” key entailed the stable introduction of the logic of the modern state, it never really performed the function of representing the interests of a structured social class. For this reason, “the modern Middle Eastern state” became the casket for finding the tools necessary to selectively determine and establish advantages and rents in favor of specific social groups and sectors. Thus, the state took on the countenance of the “political field,” that is, the arena where the various actors admitted to political confrontation and defined their position and condition according to their ability to interject or interdict, giving rise to a continuous intermediary relationship with the sources of political and material rents through individuals, families, and groups.<sup>104</sup>

For instance, Kürkçüoğlu argues that one should consider late Ottoman ruling elites’ efforts to creatively use military force and diplomacy to save the Empire in constant balancing between major European powers.<sup>105</sup> Second, he points out that TFP is heavily influenced by political leaders who enjoy considerable power over state institutions and legitimacy in the society, thus having opportunities to express personal values and views on the decisions made on foreign policy issues.<sup>106</sup> In a recent seminal essay, Zürcher, one of the most established historians of modern Turkey, investigates the role of agency in the political development of modern Turkey in its formative period

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<sup>101</sup> Erpul, O. (2014). Strategic Culture and Turkey. *Dış Politika - Foreign Policy: A Quarterly Journal of the Foreign Policy Institute*, 41, 51–66.

<sup>102</sup> See Zarakol, (2021); Ahmad, 2005; Altuğ, 1989; Cooper, 2002.

<sup>103</sup> Zubaida, S. (2009). *Islam, the people and the state: Political ideas and movements in the Middle East* (New 3rd ed). I.B. Tauris, 162.

<sup>104</sup> The most known appraisal is Bourdieu, P., Wacquant, L. J., & Farage, S. (1994). Rethinking the state: Genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field. *Sociological theory*, 12, 1-1. See also Flint, C., & Taylor, P. J. (2018). *Political geography: World-economy, nation-state and locality*. Routledge. About Turkey, see Bekmen, A. (2024). The parcelled state: a political and historical framework for the current intra-state crisis in Turkey. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 54(3), 502-522; Massicard, É., & Watts, N. F. (2013). *Negotiating political power in Turkey*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>105</sup> Kürkçüoğlu, 1980.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 321

by “placing the decisions of the Kemalist leadership in the context of international developments.”<sup>107</sup> Throughout a counterfactual historical approach, he questions the underlying narrative in historiography that sees “the creation of the Republic of Turkey a century ago, as well as the particular way it was shaped in the following decades, as a conscious act of creation [of a] determined leadership creating a ‘new Turkey’ by making radical choices.”<sup>108</sup> Regarding the formative years, he concludes that the transition to a republic was “inspired by Mustafa Kemal Pasha’s desire for a stronger executive dominated by himself and the result of a deliberate decision, but it also brought Turkey into line with the European mainstream.” The decision to abort the experiment with a liberal opposition party as soon as it proved to be genuinely popular in 1930 paved the way for fifteen years of authoritarian and repressive rule by its Republican Peoples Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP). It was, for Zürcher, a deliberate decision, but it was inextricably linked to a second one on the chosen economic developmental model and how others should have perceived Turkey.<sup>109</sup>

Another recurrent theme in the TFP study is its troublesome relations with neighbors and strategic partners. To sum up, as Yavuz notes, the combination of ontological insecurities, threats, opportunities, perceptions, elites’ conception of power, and structurally limited resources gave birth to what can be defined as the five defining principles of TFP until World War II: an inward-looking policy that focused on domestic transformation; the decision not to pursue a revanchist or irredentist foreign policy; preservation of national security, sovereignty of the state and territorial integrity; improvements in economic conditions; and the close identification with Western institutions and norms to establish long-lasting peace with major powers in Europe.”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Turkey did not get involved in the affairs of the former Ottoman lands controlled by the victorious powers of World War I (WWI). One of Turkey’s most important hallmarks of the new era was a complete break from the Ottoman past by distancing from the Muslim world and choosing to remain entirely outside of Middle Eastern affairs. The founders of the Republic deliberately stayed away from neighborhood politics because (1) they wanted to reorient Turkey’s domestic culture and institutions toward the West; (2) they did not want a conflict with European colonial powers; and (3) they carried negative memories from the First World War regarding the Arab elite’s cooperation with the British against the Ottomans.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> In his words, “Or, to formulate it slightly differently, to ask to what extent the decisions of the Kemalist leadership were, in fact, unavoidable because they involved an adjustment to a movement of change in the wider world, an expression of the ‘Zeitgeist.’” See Zürcher, E.-J. (2023). Three turning points in the political development of modern Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 437.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 438. Sometimes this is immediately apparent from the titles of the books: Paul Dumont’s 1983 *Mustafa Kemal invente la Turquie moderne* (Mustafa Kemal Invents Modern Turkey), for instance, or Feroz Ahmad’s 1993 *The Making of Modern Turkey*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Idem.

<sup>110</sup> Yavuz, M. H. (2022). The motives behind the AKP’s foreign policy: Neo-Ottomanism and strategic autonomy. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 665.

<sup>111</sup> Idem.

The same cautiousness characterized Turkey's approach toward Europe. Its avoidance of getting into European affairs became evident when the Turkish Grand National Assembly renounced war as an instrument of national policy amid the increasing tensions in the continent in the late 1920s<sup>112</sup>. While the European powers were entering a new decade of aggression, Turkey's leaders focused on signing friendship and neutrality agreements to create stability around the country.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, some authors note that a cautious approach did not mean total abstinence from diplomatic activism in Turkey's quest for multilateralism and institutionalism. This is because Ankara was eager to be part of such efforts in a climate where opportunities were presented by several attempts to create a new world order after World War I. In a speech delivered to the Grand National Assembly on November 1, 1928, President Mustafa Kemal stated, "The Republican government is actively involved in promoting international pacts to maintain security."<sup>114</sup> Even after Atatürk's death (1938), the Turkish leadership learned the lesson of the Ottoman defeat in World War I and stayed neutral.<sup>115</sup> Some authors consider this to be in line with the Ottoman's tradition of "balancing" because Turkey took a position that not only accorded relative autonomy but also, as Gülmez argued, made it a "holder of balance," having an impact on the international balance of power without choosing sides."<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Deringil has depicted Turkey's international relations until 1939 as characterized by "relative autonomy" and between 1939 and 1945 as one of "active neutrality."<sup>117</sup>

### 1.3.2. The Identity Dilemmas during the Cold War

This policy ended when the configuration of a bipolar order within the context of the Cold War called Turkey to choose a camp. It is interesting to survey the debate on what shaped Turkey's strategy to align with the Western bloc. Most scholars give prominence to systemic factors, stating that, vis-à-vis the emergence of new threats to its security and territorial integrity, Turkey was mainly

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<sup>112</sup> Criss, N. B. (2017). Turkey's Foreign Policies During the Interwar Period (1923–1939). In P. Gözen Ercan (Ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy: International Relations, Legality and Global Reach* (pp. 17–38). Springer International Publishing.

<sup>113</sup> With the Soviets (1925), Italy (1928), and Greece (1930). Then Turkey became a member of the League of Nations in 1932. Due to external threats, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk also formed two major alliances during the interwar period. Turkey led the 1934 Balkan Entente against Mussolini's expansion and the 1937 Saadabad Pact. Millman, B. (1995). Turkish foreign and strategic policy 1934–42. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31(3), 483–508.

<sup>114</sup> Eventually, Ankara became a signatory to the Briand-Kellogg Pact adopted in Paris on August 27, 1928. See Criss, 2017.

<sup>115</sup> By signing a Turkish-French-British alliance agreement in 1939 and a nonaggression pact with Germany in 1941.

<sup>116</sup> Gülmez, S. B. (2017). Turkish foreign policy as an anomaly: Revisionism and irredentism through diplomacy in the 1930s. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 44(1), 30–47.

<sup>117</sup> Deringil, S., & Karpat, K. H. (1991). Deringil, Selim. Turkish Foreign Policy During The Second World War: An Active Neutrality, Review. *The International History Review*, 13(1), 192.

preoccupied with not being able to counter the Soviet threat alone in its immediate neighborhood.<sup>118</sup> Asking, “Why then did Turkish foreign policy reverse itself following World War II?” Aydın recognized a duality at play, in which several domestic and systemic factors had pushed Turkey towards Western tutelage in general and Western-dependent foreign policy in particular.<sup>119</sup> According to him, in the global arena, two crucial and interconnected developments played pivotal roles in Turkey’s decision to foster closer relationships with Western nations. Firstly, there was a transformation in the international system’s structure, swiftly transitioning from a balance-of-power paradigm to a bipolar framework. Within such a structure, as per Aron et al.’s paradigm, maintaining a policy of neutrality was hardly feasible or realistic for a country like Turkey, positioned as a middle-range power in such a geopolitically vital area.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower and its subsequent demands on Turkey posed delicate challenges for the nation.

As many observers noted, the driving force behind Turkey’s shift towards Western alignment did not originate from the West but rather emerged as a response to pressures exerted by the Soviet Union.<sup>121</sup> To put it differently, while allying with the West was an all-encompassing long-term objective of the new elites, a more vital need stemming from the Ottoman Empire’s legacy was to protect its eastern flank from the historical Russian threat. In this sense, with the emergence of the bipolar international system of the Cold War, modern Turkey faced the same menace and was forced to find an ally to protect its interests against the USSR (Russia).<sup>122</sup> However, the differences were the presence of a more restrictive regional and international environment, and foreign policy behavior had become crucial to proving Turkey’s credentials towards a great integration into the Western security umbrella.<sup>123</sup>

However, against the idea of an unconditioned “submission” to the Western bloc, some recognize that the way these choices became a reality mirrored the preferences of the Turkish elite and their need to balance out with internal demands,<sup>124</sup> these choices were coherent with their domestic political, economic, and ideational orientation. It is interesting that Turkey did not choose

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<sup>118</sup> Basing rights on the straits, and a revision of the Montreaux Convention; İsci, O. (2023). Turkey at a Crossroads: The Soviet Threat and Postwar Realignment, 1945–1946. *Diplomatic History*, 47(4), 621–646.

<sup>119</sup> Aydın, 2000, 4.

<sup>120</sup> Aron, R., Mahoney, D. J., & Anderson, B. C. (2017). *Peace & War: A Theory of International Relations* (1st ed.). Routledge.

<sup>121</sup> İsci, 2023; İşçi, O. (2021). Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War II: Diplomacy, discord and international relations. I.B.Tauris; Karpat, K. H. (1975). Turkish Soviet Relations. In K. H. Karpat (Ed.), *Turkey’s Foreign Policy in Transition, 1950-1974* (pp. 73–107). BRILL.

<sup>122</sup> Aydın, 2000, 7.

<sup>123</sup> Turkey became one of the major recipients of US military aid through the Greek-Turkish Aid Act signed by US President Harry Truman in 1947, joined NATO in 1952, and applied to the European Community (EC) in 1959 for associate membership. Turkey also joined Great Britain, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in signing the Baghdad Pact in 1955 to prevent Soviet influence in the region.

<sup>124</sup> See Yilmaz, Ş. (2015). *Turkish-American Relations, 1800-1952* (0 ed.). Routledge; Lippe, J. M. V. (2000). Forgotten brigade of the forgotten war: Turkey’s participation in the Korean War. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36(1), 92–102; Atmaca, A. Ö. (2014). The Geopolitical Origins of Turkish-American Relations: Revisiting the Cold War Years. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 3(1), 19–19.

to guarantee its security through bilateral agreements with the US, like other pro-Western Middle Eastern states, but instead struggled fiercely and consistently to become part of NATO against all odds. This resulted from the policy favoring institutionalized cooperation and Ankara's quest to become part of the Western state system. Thus, at the height of the Cold War, Turkey felt less in-between as it anchored itself firmly with NATO and the Western bloc.<sup>125</sup> As Yılmaz and Bilgin found, "Turkey's 'westernness' has been expressed, not only through the adoption of ideas and manners from the West (as happened in Ottoman times), but also through joining Western institutions, such as NATO."<sup>126</sup> First, they posit that state identity in Turkey is always potentially precarious, it constantly needs to be stabilized or (re)produced".<sup>127</sup> Second, there is also an ideational and identity perspective that reinforces the construction of the "self" in contrast to the "other." In other words, what makes foreign policy (i.e., relations between states) possible is a political practice that makes certain events and actors foreign," namely "the politics of exclusion and inclusion."<sup>128</sup>

From this perspective, questions of identity have also begun to gain room in analyses of TFP. For instance, Bilgin follows the distinction that Campbell draws between "Foreign Policy" (through which others are rendered "foreign") and "foreign policy" (through which relations with others who are rendered "foreign" are managed)<sup>129</sup>. In his view, in a post-structuralist orientation, the seemingly intransigent structures of history are effects (although very powerful) of a variety of uncoordinated practices of differentiation that constitute meaning and identity through a series of exclusions. To quote,

Meaning and identity are, therefore, always the consequence of a relationship between the self and the other that emerges through the imposition of an interpretation rather than being the product of uncovering an exclusive domain with its own pre-established identity. This means that the domestic and the external, the state and the international system, and the sovereign and the anarchic are not domains that exist in essence prior to a relationship with each other. While the precise form and content of the identities of these domains are dependent on specific historical contexts, we can say that identity in the realm of global politics can be understood as the outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the inside are linked through a discourse of danger with threats identified and located on the outside. This demarcation is achieved through an inscription of danger on ambiguity in such a way that the differences within are transformed into differences between.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Altunışık, 2023, 8.

<sup>126</sup> Yılmaz, E., & Bilgin, P. (2005). Constructing Turkey's "Western" Identity during the Cold War: Discourses of the Intellectuals of Statecraft. *International Journal*, 61(1), 39.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Yılmaz & Bilgin, 2005, 40.

<sup>129</sup> Campbell, D. (1990). Global Inscription: How Foreign Policy Constitutes the United States. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 15(3), 265-66.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 265-66.



This implies that the first understanding entails “Foreign Policy” as state-based and conventionally understood and is thus not as equally implicated in the constitution of identity as the first understanding. Instead, Foreign Policy serves to reproduce the constitution of identity made possible by foreign policy and to contain challenges to that identity. The second is a concept in which “foreign policy” refers to all relationships of otherness, practices of differentiation, or modes of exclusion that constitute their objects as foreign in dealing with them. In this sense, foreign policy is divorced from the state as a particular resolution of the categories of identity and difference. It applies to all confrontations between a self and another located in different sites of ethnicity, race, class, gender, or locale. Operating at all levels of social organization, from personal relationships to global orders, “foreign policy in this sense has established conventional dispositions in which particular representational practices provide the modes of interpretation employed to handle new instances of ambiguity or contingency.”<sup>131</sup>

Drawing from this conceptualization, Bilgin explores how Turkey’s insecurities have shaped a “Foreign Policy” that rests on the West/non-West divide. In juxtaposing the insights of prevalent approaches to foreign policy analysis and their critics, she stresses the need to understand (in)security as a whole concerning both material and non-material dimensions.<sup>132</sup> Her point is slightly different from the ones frequently made in the literature, as she sees early republican TFP foreign policy stance of “no total confidence in friends or the outer world”<sup>133</sup> as the productive tension between seeing the West as a source of inspiration as much as insecurity that is better captured by the notion of ambivalence.<sup>134</sup>

From a historical viewpoint, the value of Turkey’s NATO membership is illustrative since it represented a collective defense organization and a broad cultural context uniting member-states who shared common cultural and normative traits by marking their differences from those states that belonged to the East.<sup>135</sup> This also finds confirmation when looking at the archives and discourses of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., see note 13.

<sup>132</sup> Bilgin, P. (2017). *The international in security, security in the international*. Routledge.

<sup>133</sup> Atatürk is quoted to have said in the early years of the National Struggle that “our nation’s fault is to have manifested over-confidence in the honesty of Europe.” Kırkçuoğlu, Ö. (1980). An Analysis of Atatürk’s Foreign Policy 1919-1938. *Milletlerarası*, 20, 138. Also, see Karaosmanoğlu, A. L. (2000). The evolution of the national security culture and the military in Turkey. *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), 199–216.

<sup>134</sup> Bilgin, 2009, 117.

<sup>135</sup> It is a point presented clearly in the preamble of the Washington Treaty (1949), in which the signatories described themselves as “determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage, and civilization of other peoples, founded upon principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.” NATO, “North Atlantic treaty,” Brussels, 1949, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int); Williams, M. C., & Neumann, I. B. (2000). From Alliance to Security Community: NATO, Russia, and the Power of Identity. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29(2), 361. This is not meant to de-emphasize the role played by the Soviet threat in the formation of NATO. Rather, the point is that NATO, once formed, was kept together, not only by means of threat politics (i.e., with reference to Soviet expansionist tendencies) but also through resorting to various representational practices that emphasized the cultural ties. See, for example, “Report of the Committee of the Three on nonmilitary cooperation in NATO” (approved by the North Atlantic Council in December 1956).

intellectuals and statecraft figures. For instance, Ambassador Haluk Bayülken, former representative of Turkey to the UN (1969-1971), referred to Turkey's joining the Korean War effort concerning its identity as a "reliable" UN member state: "[t]his belief of Turkey in the ideals embodied in the Charter was a major factor deciding Turkey's position in the Korean War... It was the adaptation of [the UN] resolution which enabled the United Nations to send forces to Korea."<sup>136</sup> However, this did not mean the avoidance of disagreements among Turkish policymakers. For instance, one arose between Prime Minister Şemsettin Günaltay and Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak. While in the latter's opinion, not including Turkey in the Atlantic Pact was a big mistake, the former affirmed that:

From the beginning, we did not believe that joining the Atlantic Pact would be beneficial. It is now impossible to draw up another pact, but I can say that our position now is stronger than it would be if we entered NATO. We have never shown any particular desire to join the pact. From a security perspective, our current position is better. If we had joined the pact, we would have taken on many unnecessary responsibilities.<sup>137</sup>

This is also a demonstration that, since the very beginning, Turkey's strategic engagement with the United States "did not remain static."<sup>138</sup> Washington encouraged the emergence of multiparty competition within a democratic political context between the middle and late 1940s. Though not yet evident, this external conditionality would eventually mark the early erosion of elite Kemalism in favor of a (Sunni) Islamist populism.<sup>139</sup> The Islamist challenge to this new identity occasionally created tension between the secular/Kemalist elite and the Islamists in Turkey, which from time to time impinged upon Turkey's foreign policy.

Therefore, authors like Bozdağlıoğlu recognizes that the debate on TFP has always been an extension of the discussion on national identity."<sup>140</sup> Also, Oran pioneered the idea of how national questions and ideological competition in Turkey have contributed to TFP's choices.<sup>141</sup> Seemingly,

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<sup>136</sup> Bayülken, Ü. Halûk. (2001). *Cyprus question and the United Nations*. Cyprus Research & Pub. Centre, 100-103.

<sup>137</sup> Evsile, M. (2022). Prof. Dr. M. Şemsettin Günaltay'ın Milletvekili Olarak TBMM'deki Faaliyetleri. *Amasya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 12, 170.

<sup>138</sup> Robins, P. (2014). The Foreign Policy of Turkey. In R. A. Hinnebusch & A. Ehteshami (Eds.), *The foreign policies of Middle East states* (Second edition, pp. 315–338). Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

<sup>139</sup> Together with the career officer corps, senior figures in the bureaucracy, mainstream intellectuals, and members of the foreign policy-making elite, notably the foreign ministry, the leaders of the Democratic Party were drawn from the same narrow social circle that dominated and led the Kemalist movement. For instance, the leaders were overwhelmingly drawn from among graduates of the *Mulkiye*, the traditional training center for emerging, senior state officials at Ankara University. Important to note is that, as Zubaida notes, this fact has facilitated the coexistence of Turkish nationalism and Islamist ideology in much of the Turkish Islamic revival, as well as in ultra-right activism. The thrust of Gokalp's theories and of Kemalism, however, was to separate Turkish Islam from that of its neighbors and its historical association with them: it was precisely the Arab and Persian heritage that was seen as a burden of backwardness and corruption of the pure Turkish heritage. Turkish Islamism, though opposed to this secular nationalism and often declaring the unity of Islam, nevertheless took specifically Turkish forms. Much of Turkish Islamism depended organizationally and ideologically on the revivals and continuities with older Sufi orders, mainly branches of the Naqshbandi. As such there was little organizational link with the Arab world, and certainly not Shi'a Iran. In effect, Turkish Islamism is national, and often nationalist. Zubaida, S. (2004). Islam and nationalism: Continuities and contradictions. *Nations and Nationalism*, 10(4), 414.

<sup>140</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, Y. (2008). Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 10(1), 55–76.

<sup>141</sup> Oran, 2002.

Bagdonas notes that Turkey's longstanding orientation toward the West (as well as its relative aloofness for several decades from the Middle East and broader Muslim world) has been explained as a manifestation of the country's Kemalist identity, which equated modernization with Westernization and predicated Turkey's joining of the "civilized world" with maintaining strong ties with Western countries. However, he goes, "Kemalism also has multiple interpretations and points of emphasis (including a 'realist' element prioritizing survival as well as an anti-imperialist outlook that tempered Turkey's identification with the West), thereby providing a "repertoire" for decision makers."<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, Kemalism was not unchallenged within Turkey, and as other actors (most prominently Islamic-oriented ones) achieved some measure of influence, they impinged upon the prevailing Western identity and orientation in TFP. In sum, while the Kemalists argued that the best way to protect Turkey's interests lay in the Western-oriented foreign policy they had developed, Islamists contended that Turkey's interests reside in the Muslim world and civilization to which Turkey originally belonged. It should be clear that each group's ideas regarding Turkey's foreign policy preferences filtered down from their self-ascribed identities, which determined their perceptions of Turkish national interest.

Consequently, this opens questions related to Turkey's domestic role contestation about the role Turkey should play in international affairs. As Lindsey Lintz notes:

Contestation among identity proposals both shapes and is shaped by foreign policy gambits whose domestic identity components might not be immediately be observable. [...] elites who face obstacles or threats to their attempts to spread their own proposal for national identity across the population at home choose to take their struggle outside to the foreign policy arena. These international struggles, in turn, have distinctive, often counter-intuitive, effects on the contours of domestic identity discourse.<sup>143</sup>

Undoubtedly, the 1950s and 1960s were also considered a period in which Turkey experienced drastic changes in its domestic environment, with the rise of new political forces at the expense of the traditional Kemalist elite. Indeed, some scholars highlight how leaders filtered the international dimension and had domestic implications for Turkey. For instance, when it was officially announced that Turkey would be invited to NATO, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes stated:

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<sup>142</sup> Demirtas-Bagdonas, Ö. (2008). *A Post-Structuralist Approach to Ideology and Foreign Policy: Kemalism in the Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse* [PhD Thesis]. Central European University. For example, the opposition criticized the DP's decision to send Turkish troops to Korea, one of, if not the most important, Turkish foreign policy decisions of the 1950s, more because of the way it was made than for its content." Although Menderes did not consult with the opposition party on matters of foreign policy, he was usually criticized only on matters of implementation rather than the decision itself. This was highlighted in a discussion with a Turkish historian.

<sup>143</sup> Hintz, L. (2016). "Take it outside!" National identity contestation in the foreign policy arena. *European Journal of International Relations*, 22(2), 336.

Of course, the decision that we learned was made [...] in favor of Turkey's admission to the Atlantic Pact as a member with equal rights was welcomed with great satisfaction by the Government...In the Atlantic Pact community, our country, in its cooperation with other member States, has the goodwill that constitutes the hallmark of our foreign policy. It will always be inspired by the principles of sincerity and keeping promises.<sup>144</sup>

During this era of apex in Turkish-American diplomatic relations, Turkey assumed the role of a pivotal “southern flank” for NATO. However, guided by a sure overconfidence, the Democratic Party’s approach in the 1950s saw an attempt to position Turkey as indispensable and integral to Western interests in the Middle East.<sup>145</sup> This was not only a complete reversal of Turkey’s earlier non-interventionist Middle East policy but also of how Turkey’s new political elites tried to prove their loyalty to the Western bloc while searching for a more active role.

Another prominent disagreement regarding TFP was evident in Turkey’s interactions with the European Economic Community (EEC). As mentioned, Turkey was envisioned as a Western, predominantly European state from its inception as a republic, leading to a strong aspiration for affiliation. Müftüler-Baç states, “The aspiration to be acknowledged as a European state in its own right has always been an underlying goal of Turkish foreign policy.”<sup>146</sup> Turkey’s challenging relations with the EEC raised significant questions concerning Turkish national identity after the Ankara Agreement was signed with the European Community in September 1963, thereby gaining associate-member status. The agreement confirmed Turkey’s “Europeanness” for many in the country.<sup>147</sup> The secular elite also regarded these natural connections with the West as pivotal in ensuring the irreversible progression of Turkey’s modernization efforts. European membership was considered the ultimate milestone in this trajectory, especially considering that the EEC was seen by Turkish policymakers as the economic cornerstone of the Western alliance, reinforcing and solidifying the

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<sup>144</sup> Başbakan Adnan Menderes’in AFP, AP ve Reuters’e verdiği beyanat. (1951, September 21). BCA.030.01.13767. See Criss, N. B. (2012). Türkiye-NATO İttifakının Tarihsel Boyutu. 9(34), 15.

<sup>145</sup> The most salient illustration of this pursuit was the Baghdad Pact. The Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), formerly known as the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) and also known as the Baghdad Pact, was a military alliance of the Cold War. It was formed on 24 February 1955 by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The alliance was dissolved on 16 March 1979. Under the Pact, Turkey sought to propagate its regional influence throughout the Arab world, yet with scarce success. For instance, the misinterpretation of Egypt’s Arab nationalism, under the leadership of Gamal Abdul Nasser, as Communist sympathies; its encouragement of Jordan, a friendly yet fragile state, to overcommit in seeking membership; inadvertent facilitation of regime change in Iraq, and its brinkmanship with Syria in 1958, all contributed to pushing the latter towards the Soviet sphere of influence.

<sup>146</sup> Müftüler-Baç, M. (1997). *Turkey’s relations with a changing Europe*. Manchester University Press.

<sup>147</sup> Baade, H. W. (1963). Milletlerarası Münasebetler Turk Yillığı [The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations]. Vol. I, 1960. Ankara: Sevine. Press., 1961. Pp.viii, 220. *American Journal of International Law*, 57(2), viii, 220. *American Journal of International Law*, 57(2), 463-466. For an overview, see Verney, S. (2007). National identity and political change on Turkey’s road to EU membership. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 9(3), 213-221; Hale, W., & Avci, G. (2001). Turkey and the European Union: The Long Road to Membership. In B. Rubin & K. Kirisci (Eds.), *Turkey in World Politics* (pp. 31–48). Lynne Rienner, 42.

political alliance.<sup>148</sup> However, for Islamists, membership in European institutions was viewed as “a scheme to assimilate Islamic Turkey within Christian Europe.”<sup>149</sup>

Proof of interconnection between the international, domestic, and leadership grounds appeared more significantly after Turkey attempted to recalibrate its foreign policy in the late 1960s. On the one hand, the fact that the Communist threat not only constituted a structural determinant in Turkey’s neighborhood but also within its borders (with the rise of leftist movements) reinforced Turkish leadership’s intentions to appear as an indispensable ally to secure greater aid from the West<sup>150</sup>. On the other hand, when the Cold War entered a period of limited detente in 1954, Turkey was left behind in normalizing East-West relations and hardly fatigued to mend its relationship with the Arab World.<sup>151</sup> At the leadership level, as many historians have recognized<sup>152</sup>, the leaders of Turkey did not agree that a detente would be possible between the two blocs, did not accept non-alignment as a viable solution, and did not believe in the sincerity of a peaceful coexistence policy which they regarded as another tactic by the Soviet Union to deceive the free world.<sup>153</sup> However, due to systemic and internal changes, the whole TFP thinking was experiencing a re-evaluation and reorientation process along with the rise of anti-American sentiments in Turkey. With increasing global interdependence, particularly during the period of relaxation, smaller members of alliance systems found opportunities to foster broader economic and political connections with other states, irrespective of military blocs. In such a fragmented world, “Turkey had to expand its relations to these new centers of economic, political, and military power to take full advantage of its economic and political potential.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Eralp, A. (1992). Turkey and the European Community: Forging New Identities along Old Lines. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 8, 1–14.

<sup>149</sup> İlkin, S. (1990). A History of Turkey’s Association with the European Community. In A. Evin & G. Denton (Eds.), *Turkey and the European Community* (pp. 35–49). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 35.

<sup>150</sup> The awkward role Turkey played at the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference in championing the cause of Western powers may all be interpreted as a part of Democrat Party’s efforts to appear as an indispensable ally in order to secure greater aid from the West. Likewise, its support of the Western powers at the Suez crisis of 1956; its fierce opposition to the 1958 Iraqi coup; its threats to Syria in 1957 to invade in case the Communists, or the Soviet Union, had gained control over Damascus, were all the parts of Turkey’s efforts to exacerbate the Communist threat in its immediate borders in order to get more economic and military aid as well as the result of the Democrat Party’s foreign policy thinking which was essentially anti-Soviet.” See, Aydın, 2000, 10. Also Karpas, 1975.

<sup>151</sup> During this period, Turkey’s relations with the Middle Eastern Arab countries, and Third World states in general, were literally an extension of its Western-dependent foreign policy, as well. Even before Turkey’s accession to a Western defense system, there were enough factors leading to a deterioration of Turkish-Arab relations. First of all, historical experiences, that is, the relationship between the rulers (Ottoman Turks) and the ruled (Arabs), surely colored the relations. Secondly, Atatürk’s reforms created a difference between two Islamic peoples, and the general secularization of Turkey in the name of modernization (Westernization) created profound resentment and mistrust among Arabs.” See Aydın, 2000.

<sup>152</sup> Ülman, A. H. (1972). Türk Dış Politikasına Yöne Veren Hareketler (1923—1968) II. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 27(1), 7-8.

<sup>153</sup> See Premier Menderes’s statement shortly after the Bandung Conference, quoted in Gönlübol, M. (1996). *Olaylarla Türk dış politikası: 1919-1995* (9th ed). Siyasal Kitabevi, 276.

<sup>154</sup> Aydın, 2000, 14.

### 1.3.3. A Stronger Outside-In Perspective for TFP

These outside-in mechanisms were also prompted by drastic changes in Turkey's domestic realm, a combination of which affected the thinking of Turkish people in general and their approach to matters of foreign policy in particular. Although the 1960 coup and the military government afterward produced a relatively free "political atmosphere under the liberal Constitution of 1961"<sup>155</sup>, they also opened the way for a series of weak and generally ineffective coalition governments,<sup>156</sup> in which ideological differences between Turkey's various political parties prevented a fundamental change in Turkish foreign policy during the 1970s. However, the need for change came from the Cyprus question, which represented the catalyst that forced Turkey to reexamine its foreign policy in light of a rapidly changing world system to avoid the risk of absolute isolation.<sup>157</sup>

In the aftermath of its unilateral intervention<sup>158</sup>, the Turkish desire for Soviet economic assistance, given declining American financial and military aid, the development of a highly vocal political opposition, and growing anti-American sentiment in Turkey all contributed to Turkey's rapprochement with the Soviet Union.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, although Turkey began to pursue a multi-faceted foreign policy, and its restrained position in the 1967 Cyprus crisis paid off as some Arab states started to take a more favorable stand in international forums, soon Ankara was dragged into domestic conflicts and consequently inactivity in the foreign policy area. Indeed, the 1971 military intervention and subsequent period of caretaker governments of 1971-73 resulted in significant domestic changes that would extend instability for the following decade until the 1980s military coup. While Ankara's approach to the Middle East and the Soviet bloc after 1960 mirrored the Republic's early cautious policies, its relationship with Greece starkly differed. Instead of peaceful coexistence,

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<sup>155</sup> For the effects of the 1960 Military Coup and new Constitution on subsequent Turkish politics, and for political developments during the 1960s and early 1970s. See Ahmad, F. (with Royal Institute of International Affairs). (1977). *The Turkish experiment in democracy: 1950-1975*. Inst. of Internat. Affairs; Karpas, K. H. (1973). *Social change and politics in Turkey: A structural-historical analysis*. Brill; Hale, W. M. (Ed.). (1976). *Aspects of modern Turkey*. Bowker [for] the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies of the University of Durham; E.D. Ellis, 'Post-Revolutionary Politics in Turkey', *Current History* (April 1962).

<sup>156</sup> Between 1961 and 1980 only the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) of Süleyman Demirel, could form a majority government, first in 1965 and then in 1969. All other times, however, Turkey governed by either coalition or minority governments, except military-supported aboveparty governments after both 1960 and 1971 interventions.

<sup>157</sup> Aydın, 2000, 17.

<sup>158</sup> For political developments and pressures upon İnönü before his decision to land Cyprus. See Bolukbasi, S. (1988). *The Superpowers and the third world: Turkish-American relations and Cyprus*. Univ. Pr. of America. Also Harris, G. S. (1972). *Troubled Alliance: Turkish-American Problems in Historical Perspective 1945-71*. *Am Enterprise*, 112-114. He maintained that İnönü, who had shown himself throughout his career to be wary of foreign adventures, never wanted to intervene. He further speculates that when İnönü decided to land, he was expecting that the Americans, when they learned, would exert pressure on the Greek side to back down and would warn Turkey to use only peaceful means to find a solution - learning that could help İnönü to resist mounting pressure at home. The American response was the now infamous Johnson letter of 1964, which was described by İnönü in his reply as "disappointing both in wording and content. See Bolukbasi, S. (1993). The Johnson letter revisited. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29(3), 505-525.

<sup>159</sup> In his memoirs, former Turkish Foreign Minister F.C. Erkin claims that Turkey moved to normalize relations with the Soviet Union because the Soviet threat to Turkey had decreased due to the NATO alliance, the rise of China as a balancing force, its economic difficulties on the domestic front, and demands for autonomy by the Soviet Union's allies in Eastern Europe. Quoted in Karpas, 1975, 90.

Turkey and Greece experienced two near-wars and one actual conflict, all centered around Cyprus, between 1960 and 1980. The power-sharing agreements established in 1959 began to deteriorate shortly after Britain granted independence to its island colony on August 16, 1960. The situation worsened with increasing clashes between the majority Greek and minority Turkish communities in 1963 and early 1964. Greek Cypriot President Archbishop Makarios expelled Turkish members from the bicomunal government, formed a Greek militia, blockaded and attacked Turkish settlements, and voiced his support for *enosis* (union with Greece). Despite repeated warnings from Ankara, Turkey's Parliament, reflecting a surge in nationalist sentiment, authorized Prime Minister İnönü to take military action in mid-March. However, as in the past and in line with its Kemalist background, İnönü displayed caution, arguing against intervention on the grounds of military unpreparedness and warning that losses would outnumber gains. At the same time, others underscore how Turkey was conditioned by "its reliance on the US." As Mufti reports, according to İlder Türkmen, a young diplomat at the time who later went on to become Foreign Minister, İnönü suggested early in the crisis: "Let's first ask the Americans what they think."<sup>160</sup>

American mediation restored the status quo ante but did not resolve the underlying conflict. Following a problematic resolution to another crisis in 1967, an aide to President Johnson cautioned that the US We [could not] hold Turkey back a third time if there is another blow-up on the island."<sup>161</sup> This predicted crisis occurred on July 15, 1974, when military officers supported by the Athens junta overthrew President Makarios and aimed to achieve *enosis*. Despite the severity of the situation, the Turkish cabinet, a coalition between Ecevit's CHP and the Islamist National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*, MSP), hesitated before deciding on military action. Following İnönü's stance, some CHP ministers advocated for continued diplomacy, warning that an invasion would provoke American anger. Ultimately, Ecevit's resolve was crucial; he overruled the dissenters and strong American opposition, ordering the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) to deploy troops to Cyprus early on July 16. The military operation commenced on July 20, resulting in Turkish troops occupying approximately 40% of the island by its conclusion nearly a month later. Whether this crisis diverged from the traditional Kemalist paradigm, Mufti argues that "in both cases, Turkey's security

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<sup>160</sup> Mufti, 2009, 44. See note 62.

<sup>161</sup> Memorandum entitled "NSC Discussion of Cyprus" prepared by Walt W. Rostow and dated 23 January 1968. See it in Miller, J. E. (2000). *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVI, Cyprus; Greece; Turkey*. United States Government Printing Office Washington. For the Turkish reaction, see the CIA's document here: [https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000615268.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000615268.pdf). In the aftermath of the Cyprus crisis and Turkey's threat of military intervention, the letter was delivered on 5 June 1964 by the then US Ambassador Raymond Hare to the late Prime Minister İsmet İnönü. "The impact of what in Turkey became known as the "infamous Johnson Letter" was so powerful that most Turks considered it a solemn indication that the US controlled everything in that it even directed Turkish foreign policy. It also gave much-needed momentum to the Turkish Left, which branded it a symbol of American imperialism." This triggered a harsh and hostile sentiment among Turkish politicians and the public about the impossibility of trusting the US and NATO when Turkey's national interest was at stake. See Bolukbasi, 1993.

establishment lacked clear strategic cultural guidelines on what to do, so the decision ultimately depended on the characters and inclinations of individual leaders.”<sup>162</sup> However, other interesting points emerged from the period. First, in response to the Greek attempt at a *fait accompli* and lacking clear guidelines from the Republican strategic culture, Turkey adopted a more assertive stance. Consequently, Turkish security interests necessitated maintaining a presence in Cyprus and reconsidering the status of the Dodecanese and other Greek-controlled Aegean islands.<sup>163</sup> Second, this episode also confirmed Turkey’s longstanding suspicions of Western intentions, particularly highlighted by the US Congress’s decision to impose an arms embargo on Turkey on February 5, 1975, due to its refusal to withdraw from Cyprus. This reinforced Turkey’s inclination to pursue a multilateral foreign policy to avoid dependence on any single power.<sup>164</sup> Third, after Turkey announced the creation of a “Fourth Army” for the Aegean coast in July 1975, independent of NATO command, Prime Minister Ecevit suggested in a 1978 speech that “the Soviet Union was no longer a threat,” indicating a significant shift in Turkish foreign policy.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, it seems to confirm a debate that had already begun with the Turkish bitterness against the Johnson letter. As a document retrieved from the CIA goes:

The general consensus [in Turkey] was that this letter makes it almost mandatory for Turkey to become more independent of the United States in international relations. [...] This illustrates that the United States has not understood and still does not understand Turkish intentions or position regarding Cyprus.<sup>166</sup>

The Cyprus crisis anticipated another major conjuncture at the domestic level with the 1980 military coup. Indeed, Turkey’s third military coup was driven by a conservative desire to re-establish stability within a Republican system strained by the resurgence of long-repressed social identities and interests. This period saw economic stagnation and class conflict escalate into increasing violence between leftist revolutionaries and rightist militants in the late 1970s. Additionally, Islamist parties were growing consistently, while Kurdish unrest led to martial law being declared in six southeastern provinces in April 1979. Mainstream politicians struggled to form stable governments capable of addressing these growing class, sectarian, and ethnic challenges, which undermined the Republican framework. The generals were also concerned about Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit’s “National Security Doctrine,” announced on February 13, 1978, fearing it signaled a shift towards non-

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<sup>162</sup> Mufti, 2009, 43.

<sup>163</sup> This perception was boosted by a TSK General Staff study that suggested that the Greeks had not abandoned their “Megalo Idea” of reconstituting the Byzantine Empire on Turkish territory. Ibid. See note 66.

<sup>164</sup> Yavuzalp, E. (1996). *Liderlerimiz ve dış politika: Bir diplomat gözüyle* (1. basım). Bilgi Yayınevi ; Bilgi Dağıtım, 162.

<sup>165</sup> Ecevit, B. (1958). *İflâs Eden Politika. Bülent Ecevit Yazıları 1950-1961*. Ulus, Günün Işığında; Atatürk Kitaplığı.

<sup>166</sup> Bolukbasi, 1993.



alignment and a potential loss of the Western security protection Turkey had enjoyed since the mid-1940s. Regional upheavals, such as the Iranian revolution in February 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, and the onset of the Iraq-Iran War in April 1980, further eroded the military's confidence in elected officials. This culminated in the Turkish Armed Forces overthrowing the government and imposing military rule on September 12, 1980, after at least two years of planning. However,

the generals found that it was no simple matter to reassert Republican verities. The same tension between fluid social pressures and a static worldview that had brought about the troubles of the late 1970s in the first place ultimately forced them, in their turn, to cede the helm to a new actor eager to set sail into entirely uncharted waters.<sup>167</sup>

This context favored the emergence of one last feature frequently used to describe dynamics of “change” in TFP, namely the combination of material and ideational elements to elaborate new policies at both the internal and external levels. As will be explained better in the analytical section of this research, the election of Turgot Özal as Prime Minister in 1983 represented the beginning of a break with the policies of the previous sixty years of the Turkish Republic. Prompted by the adoption of the *Türk-İslam Sentezi* (Turkish-Islamic Synthesis)<sup>168</sup> by the secular-army establishment as a modified state ideology, his Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party, ANAP) presented itself with a mix of the four major political ideologies of the Seventies (Islamic fundamentalism, left, right and radical right). Held together by Özal’s charisma, these ideological forces won favor, especially among the emerging peripheral and more conservative middle classes, who would have enjoyed the economic policies implemented by the new government. Since these reforms required material capabilities and expanded markets to be implemented, Özal needed to elaborate a new formula that would grant Turkey access to new geographical areas. As such, the term “neo-Ottomanism”<sup>169</sup> was introduced in the mid-eighties to define Turkey’s growing geo-political engagement and remains present today as a notion eminently used by academics and journalists. At this stage, neo-Ottomanism, better described

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<sup>167</sup> Mufti, 2009, 49.

<sup>168</sup> Turkish-Islamic synthesis was formulated by a group of intellectuals known as Aydınlar Ocağı (hearth of the intellectuals) and dealt with the idea that Islamic culture was a moral complement necessary to strengthen the order of values embodied in Turkish nationalism. It was elaborated in a period in which the military-civil relations underwent a first process of reform and in which the belief was that soft Islamism would have been better-off in counterbalancing the leftist and Kurdish threats. Its origins, interceptions, and peculiar features will be explained in the following chapters. For a recent debate, see Kadioğlu, A. S. (2020). *Türk-İslam Sentezi’nin Oluşum ve Gelişim Süreci*. *OPUS Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 16(27), 813–834; Alkan, M. Ö. (2014). Militarist Turkish-Islamic synthesis: Official ideology, official history and nationalism in the Second Constitutional Period. *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 1(2), 147-172.

<sup>169</sup> The debate will be addressed from an evolutionary perspective along the main chapters of this research. For a good summary of its history and debates, see Yavuz, M. H. (1998). Turkish identity and foreign policy in flux: The rise of Neo-Ottomanism. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 7(12), 19–41; Ongur, H. O. (2015). Identifying Ottomanisms: The Discursive Evolution of Ottoman Pasts in the Turkish Presents. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 51(3), 416–432.

as Özalism, emerged in relation to a new foreign policy agenda driven by the idea that Turkey could play an essential role as a regional power by trying to balance two main pillars: re-establish a pro-Western attitude by strengthening ties with both the United States and Europe while expanding relations with other regions such as the Balkans and the Middle East by blending economic growth and cultural legacies.<sup>170</sup> Coped with the final phase of the Cold War and with the emergence of Islamism in Turkey's sociopolitical milieu, all of this opened the way not only to a new way of elaborating TFP but also an increased plurality of perspectives from which to look at its unprecedented evolution.

Worth mentioning at this point is also a brief overview of an issue that, for Turkey, has traditionally represented a structural cleavage at multiple levels but that, from the late 1980s, would entail a much blurred transnational dimension, impacting Ankara's domestic, regional, and international policies.

Indeed, the Kurdish question has always signified an existential issue for the Turkish state, impacting its domestic socio-political equilibrium and its interactions with regional and international dynamics. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Kurdish-majority areas have been securitized through both discourse and practice. Hama explains that the securitization of Kurdish identity included measures such as banning the use of the Kurdish language and symbols, enforced assimilation, and militarized actions against Kurdish rebellions.<sup>171</sup> Historically, the geostrategic significance of Kurdistan stems from its liminality in a crucial area that has served as a buffer zone between greater powers since the eleventh century.<sup>172</sup> Despite being the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, the Kurds are divided among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, making them minorities in each of these countries. This division, coupled with repressive and assimilationist policies from the various nation-states emerging after World War I, has led to numerous uprisings and forms of rebellion, positioning the Kurds as the "largest stateless nation." The Kurds are also divided internally by geographical, historical, and socio-political lines, leading to the formation of numerous political parties and groups with differing leaderships and agendas. These divisions often clash with the national government's efforts to forge mono-nationalist identities.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Laçiner, S. (2009). Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism. *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law*, 2, 153–205.

<sup>171</sup> Hama, H. H. (2020). The securitization and de-securitization of Kurdish societal security in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. *World Affairs*, 183(4), 300-301.

<sup>172</sup> Ünver, H. A. (2016). Schrödinger's Kurds: Transnational Kurdish geopolitics in the age of shifting borders. *Journal of international affairs*, 69(2), 65-100.

<sup>173</sup> Gurses, M. (2018). *Anatomy of a civil war: Sociopolitical impacts of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey*. University of Michigan Press.

As such, the Kurdish question is particularly sensitive in Turkey due to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which proposed a Kurdish state in southeastern Anatolia. Although the treaty never took effect and was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the above-mentioned “Sèvres Syndrome” has influenced Turkey's perception of security and territorial threats also in this regard.<sup>174</sup> In response to Turkish assimilationist policies, Kurdish rebellions began in the 1920s and 1930s in southeastern Turkey. This initial resistance laid the groundwork for larger mobilizations and unrest by the late 1960s and 1970s. Kurdish identity found support among leftist movements seeking socio-political rights in the underdeveloped southeast. The cycle of securitization and counter-securitization intensified, fostering new waves of Kurdish nationalist and secessionist ideas.<sup>175</sup> Kurdish political mobilization became more visible in the 1960s and 1970s through student and elite movements.<sup>176</sup> These movements were also securitized and criminalized by the Turkish state, even in the absence of armed insurgency.<sup>177</sup> According to Rumelili and Çelik, for much of the 20th century, the Turkish government approached the Kurdish question through the lens of ontological (in)security, characterizing the PKK as a terrorist group collaborating with foreign enemies to threaten Turkish territorial integrity. Efforts to resolve the issue have been complicated by the ontological asymmetry typical of ethnic conflicts between more secure state parties and less secure minority ethnic groups.<sup>178</sup> The Cold War further influenced the dynamics of the Kurdish question. Kurdish nationalist groups, utilizing both liberal and leftist principles, aligned themselves with the Soviet Union and anti-imperialist movements, seeking autonomy and independence.<sup>179</sup> This geopolitical alignment was evident in alliances such as the Baghdad Pact (1955), which included Turkey, Iran, and Iraq and aimed to counter the Soviet threat and the Kurdish issue.

The emergence of the PKK marked a significant shift in Kurdish activism. Founded by Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK began a guerrilla insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984, which continues to the present times. While the USSR did not officially support the PKK, the group's conflict narrative was ideologically sustained by communist principles.<sup>180</sup> The PKK's connections

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<sup>174</sup> Kaliber, A., & Tocci, N. (2010). Civil Society and the Transformation of Turkey's Kurdish Question. *Security Dialogue*, 41(2), 191–215.

<sup>175</sup> Romano, D. (2006). The Kurdish nationalist movement: opportunity, mobilization and identity (No. 22). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>176</sup> Gündoğan, A. Z. (2015). Space, state-making and contentious Kurdish politics in the East of Turkey: the case of Eastern Meetings, 1967. In *The Kurdish Issue in Turkey* (pp. 27-59). Routledge.

<sup>177</sup> Al, S., & Byrd, D. (2018). When do states (de) securitise minority identities? Conflict and Change in Turkey and Northern Ireland. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 21, 615. Note that “Kurdish identity and language have been at the top of Turkey's military and political elites' national security agenda for decades, especially since the rise of violence between the PKK and the Turkish state after 1980 when the military coup brought 'official emergency rule' to the southeast regions of Turkey.”

<sup>178</sup> Rumelili & Çelik, 2017.

<sup>179</sup> Kaya, Z. N. (2020). Mapping Kurdistan: Territory, Self-Determination and Nationalism (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>180</sup> Balci, A. (2017). *The PKK-Kurdistan Workers' Party's Regional Politics*. Springer International Publishing.

with other leftist groups, such as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, further complicated the conflict.<sup>181</sup> With the end of the post-Cold War, the international setting evolved, allowing for greater visibility of minority issues, such that the interactions between Kurdish groups and various international actors increased, bolstered by globalization, enhanced communication, and the Kurdish diaspora's active presence.<sup>182</sup>

Key developments included forming an autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq (1992) and the strategic importance of Kurdish fighters in combating other regional non-state actors.<sup>183</sup> Despite some advancements, efforts to resolve the Kurdish issue in Turkey have faced significant challenges. Attempts at peace processes, such as the one initiated by President Turgut Özal in 1993, were short-lived. As will be seen later, the PKK's shift to non-violent means and political engagement in the early 2000s was met with limited success as the Turkish state continued to pursue a securitized approach to the Kurdish issue. At the same time, the issue brought Turkey to an uncountable position towards regional actors, especially Syria, which provided shelter to PKK's members for a long time, and Iraq, which had an ambiguous stance with these groups and denounced Turkey's military incursions in its territory. Seemingly, with the relaxation of the Cold War dynamics, the US and other Western actors would then adopt a more pragmatic approach towards the PKK and other Kurdish militias, enhancing Turkey's perception of the necessity of pursuing a more assertive and independent foreign policy. Lastly, the "transnationalization" of the issue would later become an issue of contention and a transformative factor for Turkish domestic politics, with the emergence of several pro-Kurdish political entities able to challenge the leading security and identity paradigms of the state.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Park, D. L. (2017). *The Kurdish Spring: A New Map of the Middle East*. Routledge.

<sup>182</sup> Kaya, 2020.

<sup>183</sup> Baser, B. (2015). The Kurdish Diaspora Response to Kobane: Uniting Kurds under one roof. *Occasional Paper, Oxford Diasporas Programme*.

<sup>184</sup> See Gasco, R., & Abrami, S. C. A. (2024). Beyond the Cold War and East-West Dynamics: Analyzing the PKK's Agency and Longevity. In P. Marton, G. Thomasen, C. Békés, & A. Rácz (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Non-State Actors in East-West Relations* (pp. 1–15). Springer International Publishing; Abrami, S. C. A., Gasco, R., & Baser, B. (2025). New Securitization Waves of the Kurdish Question. A Three(plus)-Level Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy

## 1.4. From the post-Cold War to Today

As the Cold War ended, a persistent call for a more assertive foreign policy emanating from the newly established political parties, emerging leaders, and public intellectuals occupied the debates in 1990s Turkey. Exaggerating the passivity of the establishment in international relations, a new orientation asked for a more dauntless outlook and wanted to replace the *status quoism* of Turkish foreign policy with a search for “missed or new opportunities.” The end of the Cold War had fundamentally altered the context within which Turkish foreign policy was conducted, and it gave way to multiple waves of foreign policy activism.<sup>185</sup> However, in the 1990s, Turkey had to cope with significant limitations. From a structural point of view, its material capabilities were insufficient to pursue an actual independent foreign policy and enhance a robust pace in leading the change in its neighborhood or international politics. In addition, its domestic context was in a turbulent period, in which fragile coalition governments proved unable to address the threats of internal terrorism and economic crisis. In other words, the Cold War and the eruption of regional and local conflicts in Turkey's surrounding regions brought new challenges and threats as well as some opportunities for the country to reshape its role in different scenarios and portray itself as a rising middle power. Regardless of political affiliations, the dominant discourse of the 1990s revolved around the idea of a “Turkish model” for other states, especially those in the Middle East and the newly independent states of Central Asia.<sup>186</sup> The belief was that, with its democratic (albeit imperfect) secular regime and liberal economic structure, Turkey could serve as an example for other countries transitioning to a form of democracy and an open market while respecting Islamic and traditional cultural values. Turkish politicians supported this discourse to maintain Turkey's strategic importance in the new era. This notion was also endorsed by Turkey's allies, particularly the newly independent Turkish Republics in Central Asia, as a counterbalance to the potential influence of Iran, which could promote a model where religion and anti-Western tendencies dominated political life.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Öniş, Z. (2011). Multiple Faces of the “New” Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique. *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), 47–65.

<sup>186</sup> Alterman, J. B., Brannen, S., Hamre, J. J., Barnett, C. L., Kuchins, A., Mankoff, J., & Cipoletti, T. J. (with Center for Strategic Studies). (2013). *The Turkey, Russia, Iran nexus: Evolving power dynamics in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>187</sup> Fuller, G. E., & Lesser, I. O. (2019). *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China*. Routledge. Worth mentioning that Fuller served 20 years as an operations officer in the CIA. Assignments include postings in Turkey. On December 1, 2017, the Istanbul chief public prosecutor's office issued an arrest warrant for Fuller based on his alleged involvement in the planning of the failed 2016 Turkish coup d'état attempt. From 1994 to 1995, Lesser was a member of the secretary's policy planning staff at the US Department of State, responsible for Türkiye, Southern Europe, North Africa, and the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process.

Yet, the extent to which Turkish governments could exploit the new opportunities presented by the end of the Cold War depended on their ability to rely on a stable domestic power base.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, the 1990s proved to be the Achilles' heel of TFP, as external problems were seriously exacerbated by internal weaknesses and conflicts.<sup>189</sup> According to Hale, the pursuit of effective democratic governance during this period was generally dismal. No single party won an overall majority in Parliament in any of the three general elections held in 1991, 1995, and 1999, leading Turkey into a state of chronic governmental instability similar to what it had experienced during the 1970s. However, the near-anarchy and eventual military takeover of 1978–80 were fortunately not repeated. This situation led to a succession of weak coalition governments and a lack of political leadership, undermining Turkey's capacity for a coherent foreign policy based on a long-term vision. These governments struggled to focus on foreign policy due to pressing domestic issues such as terrorism, human rights, and economic challenges.<sup>190</sup>

Within those complicated and “lost years for Turkish Foreign Policy,” Turkey saw the rise of Islamist movements and parties from which the AKP would germinate.<sup>191</sup> However, overall, TFP remained predominantly Western-oriented until the mid-2000s. During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the pendulum shifted more towards the daring side after the AKP took office in 2002. Initially, the AKP party adopted extensive reforms to democratize Turkey's political system with hitherto unmatched political will and popular support. These moves, which were also in response to the European Union's “harmonization packages” that could qualify Turkey for EU membership, received strong and sustained support domestically and abroad, as they did from Turkey's democratic allies and even some neighboring publics.<sup>192</sup> Beginning with the AKP's second term (2007), Turkey's

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>189</sup> Sayari, S. (2000). Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism. *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), 169–182.

<sup>190</sup> Ozkececi-Taner, B. (2005). The impact of institutionalized ideas in coalition foreign policy making: Turkey as an example, 1991–2002. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 1(3), 249–278.

<sup>191</sup> Sakallioğlu, Ü. C. (1996). Liberalism, democracy and the Turkish centre-right: the identity crisis of the true path party. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32(2), 142–161; Arcayürek, C. (2001). *Etekli demokrasi*. Bilgi Yayınevi, 191; Sayari, S. (1996). Turkey's Islamist challenge. *Middle East Quarterly*, 3, 35–43; Gulalp, H. (1999). Political Islam in Turkey: The Rise and Fall of the Refah Party. *The Muslim World*, 89(1), 22–41.

<sup>192</sup> Akkoyunlu, K., Nicolaïdis, K., & Öktem, K. (2013). *The western condition: Turkey, the US and the EU in the new Middle East*. South East European Studies at Oxford (SEESOX), 22; Öniş, Z., & Keyman, E. F. (2003). Turkey at the Polls: A New Path Emerges. *Journal of Democracy*, 14(2), 95–107. For its “identity value,” see Balcı, A., & Miş, N. (2008). Turkey's Role in the Alliance of Civilizations: A New Perspective in Turkish Foreign Policy? *Turkish Studies*, 9(3), 387–406. For a perspective from the political elite, see Balkır, C., & Eylemer, S. (2016). Shifting Logics: The Discourses of Turkish Political Elites on EU Accession. *South European Society and Politics*, 21(1), 29–43. For a normative appraisal, see Baudner, J. (2012). The Politics of ‘Norm Diffusion’ in Turkish European Union Accession Negotiations: Why It was Rational for an Islamist Party to be ‘Pro-European’ and a Secularist Party to be ‘Anti-European’. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50(6), 922–938; Celep, Ö. (2011). The Republican People's Party and Turkey's EU Membership. *South European Society and Politics*, 16(3), 423–434; Fuat Keyman, E., & Öniş, Z. (2007). Globalization and Social Democracy in the European Periphery: Paradoxes of the Turkish Experience. *Globalizations*, 4(2), 211–228.

foreign policy veered sharply away. Instead, enhancing Turkey's hegemonic role in the Middle East replaced the goal of integration with the West and became the central aim of foreign policy, particularly after the series of protest movements that engulfed much of the Middle East and North Africa in 2011.<sup>193</sup> Frequent crises and abrupt shifts in Turkey's foreign policy outlook have heightened the debate between the AKP and its critics, the latter criticizing the AKP for pursuing a mostly adventurous foreign policy.<sup>194</sup> The debate intensified in the last decade when not just the Middle East but the international system entered a period of flux and uncertainty in which traditional verities of international and regional norm setting no longer held. The changing dynamics of global politics, the transformation of the regional balance of power, the emergence of new actors, and the collapse of the states as order-setting institutions created conditions for an even more assertive foreign policy.<sup>195</sup> Coupled with unprecedented alterations on the domestic front – from the return of Islamist discourses to a democratic backsliding – Turkish political elites interpreted this emerging situation as an essential juncture to (re)achieve an honorable place for Turkey in regional power distribution, seize economic opportunities, and finally repel both traditional and emerging threats.<sup>196</sup> At the same time, institutional changes, significant setbacks in Turkey's expectations from some regional and international scenarios, and the amalgamation of nativist and nationalistic discourses of a “New Turkey”<sup>197</sup> also propelled a more assertive, unilateral, and militaristic posture aimed to pursue strategic autonomy and political objectives adherent for regime survival.<sup>198</sup>

Therefore, as underlined above, one can safely state that, since 2002, unprecedented activism in TFP behavior has been widely recognized. However, the combination of a multifaceted stance towards many issues with domestic alterations under AKP-led governments has polarized the debate among scholars, experts, and practitioners around whether changes in TFP are mostly explicable

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<sup>193</sup> D'Alema, F. (2024). Turkey's approach to the Arab spring revisited: Political field and foreign policy in the AKP era. *Turkish Studies*, 1–29; Dalay, G., & Keyman, E. F. (2021). Has Turkey's Quest for “Strategic Autonomy” Run its Course? *German Marshall Fund*.

<sup>194</sup> Kösebalaban, H. (2020). Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward Syria: The Return of Securitization. *Middle East Critique*, 29(3), 335–344; Tür, Ö., & Kumral, M. A. (2016). Paradoxes in Turkey's Syria policy: Analyzing the critical episode of agenda building. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 55, 107–132.

<sup>195</sup> Parlar Dal, E. (2013). Assessing Turkey's “Normative” Power in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and their Limitations. *Turkish Studies*, 14(4), 709–734.

<sup>196</sup> Çandar, C. (2021). *Turkey's Neo-Ottomanist Moment. A Eurasian Odyssey*. Transnational Press London.

<sup>197</sup> Abrami, S. C. A. (2024). Nostalgia for the Past in the “New Turkey”. *Kemalism and Islamism at the Brink of a Utopian-Dystopian Divide*. In *Utopian Visions, Dystopic Realities Multidisciplinary Reflections on Contemporary Challenges* (pp. 93–122). EDUCatt; Somer, M. (2016). Understanding Turkey's democratic breakdown: Old vs. new and indigenous vs. global authoritarianism. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 481–503; Christofis, N. (2018). The AKP's “Yeni Türkiye.” *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 29(3), 11–32.

<sup>198</sup> Balta, E., & Özel, S. (2021). Turkey's Foreign Policy: Opportunities and Constraints in a New Era. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 88(2), 539–560; Dalacoura, K. (2017). A New Phase in Turkish Foreign Policy: Expediency and AKP Survival. *FUTURE NOTES*, 4.

either by systemic or domestic, by material or ideational factors. Therefore, this second section of the literature review surveys recent works on TFP employing a two-faceted systematization. On the one side, despite aiming to avoid any theoretical or disciplinary debate, it is important to situate the most relevant research according to the discipline and approach adopted to study one particular aspect of foreign policy. At the same time, coherently with the objective of this research, it is crucial to address how changes in TFP have brought changes in the way the phenomena and the parameters taken into consideration within the strain of the literature are studied. Consequently, what follows is a critical analysis that points to the elements of either discrepancy or consistency between strains of the literature that adopt similar approaches to address the evolution of TFP and that, regardless of theoretical approaches, can provide significant elements for more comprehensive scopes.

#### **1.4.1. Realism and Making Sense of Shifts in TFP**

As briefly outlined above, even though Turkey's activist attitude already began on the edge of the post-Cold War period, it is from the emergence of the AKP in 2002, and especially after its power consolidation in 2009, that this activism assumed concrete and brand-new features. Inside and outside academia – whatever particular aspect one considers – these profound alterations raised the debate on the “axis shift of TFP.” While, according to the claimants, Turkey's foreign policy orientation shifted from West to East, from Europeanization to Islamic neo-Ottomanism, the academic evidence is in deep contrast over such radical definitions. Some studies falsify the axis shift argument<sup>199</sup> and assert that Turkey seeks to play an active role in the neighborhood due to changes in the international and regional context.<sup>200</sup> Yet, both the conflict areas and cooperation partners of Turkey fluctuated for a decade after 2009, displaying what is often referred to as a “quest for strategic autonomy.”<sup>201</sup> What has been the dominant view for a long time addresses AKP's Islamist background for this fluctuation by referring mainly to anti-Western discourses and a fluid conception of alliances no longer tied to traditional allies.<sup>202</sup> Paradoxically, AKP is considered one of Turkey's most pro-Western

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<sup>199</sup> For a discussion, see Oğuzlu, T. (2008). Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West? *Turkish Studies*, 9(1), 3–20.

<sup>200</sup> Başer, E. T. (2015). Shift-of-axis in Turkish Foreign Policy: Turkish National Role Conceptions Before and During AKP Rule. *Turkish Studies*, 16(3), 291–309.

<sup>201</sup> Aran, A., & Kutlay, M. (2024). Turkey's Quest for Strategic Autonomy in an Era of Multipolarity. *IPC-Mercator*.

<sup>202</sup> Çağaptay, S. (2009). Is Turkey Leaving the West? An Islamist Foreign Policy Puts Ankara at Odds With Its Former Allies. *Foreign Affairs*, 26.



governments, at least in first terms.<sup>203</sup> As Şahin argues, “From that point of view, it is hard to deny the anomaly in TFP, particularly after 2009. This raises several questions. Was 2002 a turning point in TFP? How did an Islamist background government pursue the most pro-Western policies, and why did its orientation change after 2009?”<sup>204</sup> In response to these questions related to periodization and changes, it is evident how this shift cannot be simply explained by – or dated back to – the rise of the AKP in 2002, as there have been notable changes in TFP even along the two decades of AKP continuative rule.<sup>205</sup>

What emerges is that while all of these interpretations share the necessity to realize how TFP can be understood only by considering long-term defining factors, they debate on the way to look at them. Some are more prone to focus on how TFP has historically been conditioned by its close relations with Turkey’s international environment.<sup>206</sup> Thus, they tend to stress how Turkey traditionally has been a focus point of many global and regional political processes due to its geopolitical location. On the other hand, others give prominence to other structural factors within Turkey’s national context, namely its political constellations between national elites and general populations,<sup>207</sup> military and civil government,<sup>208</sup> and relations between forces representing different political ideologies.<sup>209</sup>

First, it is worth underscoring how referring to a “shift” (or change) in TFP does not automatically mean referring to just one singular aspect of a mutable phenomenon. For instance, looking at the evolution of the national security culture and pondering over historical traumas that Turkey inherited from the Ottoman Empire, Karaosmanoğlu suggests that while for most of the Cold War Turkey was confined to the security-centered and offensive security culture, the post-1989 realities and developments in the military-civil government relations allowed to experiment or instead

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<sup>203</sup> Dahlman, C. (2004). Turkey’s Accession to the European Union: The Geopolitics of Enlargement. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 45(8), 553–574; Özerimer, I., Kugler, J., & Root, H. L. (2013). Turkey and the West: Bargaining for Realignment. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 21(2), 218–251.

<sup>204</sup> Şahin, 2020.

<sup>205</sup> Kubicek, 2022, 645.

<sup>206</sup> Just to cite few before delving into details: Bingöl, O. (2019). Changing Balancing Behaviors in Turkish Foreign Policy During AKP Period (2002-2019). *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, 13(25), 53–77; Dolatabadi, A. B., & Rezaei, R. (2022a). Erdoğan Endless Dreams: The Theoretical and Operational Framework of Turkey’s New Foreign Policy. *World Affairs*, 185(1), 114–146; Oğuzlu, H. T. (2016). Turkish foreign policy at the nexus of changing international and regional dynamics. *Turkish Studies*, 17(1), 58–67; Aknur, M., & Durmuşlar, T. (2019). Turkey’s changing security environment and transformation of Turkish foreign policy. *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 21(4), 1355–1376.

<sup>207</sup> Just to cite few before delving into details: Aydın-Düzgüt, S. (2023). Authoritarian middle powers and the liberal order: Turkey’s contestation of the EU. *International Affairs*, 99(6), 2319–2337; Özçelik, A. O., Renda, K. K., & Costello, A. (2023). Battle for the European Union in the periphery: Contestation dynamics and domestic debates. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 23(4), 679–695.

<sup>208</sup> Just to cite few before delving into details: Ciftci, S. (2023). Military might: A domestic economy explanation of Turkish foreign policy. *Turkish Studies*, 24(5), 764–787; Ege, A. (2022). Foreign policy as a means of the AKP’s struggle with Kemalism in relation to domestic variables. *Turkish Studies*, 23(4), 554–575.

<sup>209</sup> Hintz, 2018; Yanik, 2011. Just to cite a few before delving into details:

moderate its traditional foreign policy of nonintervention, and transform its reactive and defensive *Realpolitik* into “proactive foreign policy.”<sup>210</sup> Excavating with instruments from both History and IR, another major work that sheds light on variations in Turkish strategic culture was written by Malik Mufti, who created the concept of “changing strategic culture paradigms.”<sup>211</sup> He intends strategic culture as a foreign policy tradition, thus moving away from a classical definition of the term with its accent on the use of power and relations between military power and diplomacy.<sup>212</sup> Mufti insists that Turkey’s prevailing and dominant strategic culture, which he calls “Republican,” manifests itself through a conviction that the outside world is dangerous, unpredictable, and threatening Turkey’s internal stability and social cohesiveness. While the “Republican paradigm”<sup>213</sup> of strategic culture was prevalent throughout most of the years, another paradigm of strategic culture expressed itself at times. For Mufti, this alternative “Imperial paradigm” reveals itself through more active foreign policy, optimism about Turkey’s ability to shape the state of affairs in its environment, and more openness to the world.<sup>214</sup>

Throughout an attempt to find a balanced and more comprehensive definition, Taşpınar proposes that Turkey is experiencing the convergence of the two grand strategies mentioned above into a new one. Referred to as “Turkish Gaullism,” this grand strategy is fed by a shared strong sense of patriotism and attachment to the Turkish nation-state. In contrast, TFP is steered to unite the polarized society around a sense of Turkish *grandeur* and national strife for complete strategic independence.<sup>215</sup>

Many works have debated this concept by adopting the “change of paradigms.” A paradigm is defined as “a philosophical and theoretical framework of a scientific school or discipline within which theories, laws, and generalizations and the experiments performed in support of them are formulated.”<sup>216</sup> Due to the circumstances or preferences, a new paradigm emerges when the dominant paradigm begins to lose its effect. However, paradigm shifts do not occur in a short period. Starting with this definition, the foreign policy paradigm can be defined as the basis of a state’s foreign policy approach because states base their foreign policies on a fundamental paradigm to reach their objectives.<sup>217</sup> In the light of factors such as the state’s regime, geo-political position, history, and

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<sup>210</sup> Karaosmanoğlu, 2000.

<sup>211</sup> Mufti, 2009, 87.

<sup>212</sup> For the debate, see Snyder, J. L. (2023). The Concept of Strategic Culture. In F. E. Martín, N. Terradas, & D. Zambrano (Eds.), *Strategic Culture(s) in Latin America Explaining Theoretical Puzzles and Policy Continuities*. Routledge.

<sup>213</sup> Mufti, 2009, 30.

<sup>214</sup> Mufti, 2009, 87.

<sup>215</sup> Taşpınar, Ö. (2011). The Three Strategic Visions of Turkey. *Brookings*, 50.

<sup>216</sup> The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paradigm>.

<sup>217</sup> İper Taşdelen, “Dış Politikada Paradigma (Paradigm in Foreign Policy),” *Radikal Gazetesi*, June 15, 2012, accessed December 18, 2013, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/yorum/dis\\_politikada\\_paradigma-1091187](http://www.radikal.com.tr/yorum/dis_politikada_paradigma-1091187). Quoted in Aka, H. B. (2014). Paradigm Change in Turkish Foreign Policy After Post-Cold War. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 13(3).

economic and political activities, this paradigm is shaped according to its national interests, extending over a broad range of periods. When foreign policy paradigms lose effectiveness, their replacement or revision is inevitable. Yet, applications of this concept to TFP have varied. For instance, Sözen interprets paradigmatic change as a way to understand the general characteristics of TFP. To do so, throughout a framework similar to the three levels of analysis in IR (the individual, state, and systemic levels),<sup>218</sup> he examines the interplay between essential world events and emergent novel ideas at four different levels of analysis (conceptual setting, micro-setting, domestic macro-setting, and external macro setting).<sup>219</sup> However, its analysis is predominantly operationalized on the variable of ideology and visions, namely neo-Ottomanism. Similarly, Cornell's reference to "multiple shifts of axis" stresses the role of ideology to conclude that "the Turkish leadership does not consider itself Western, a worldview that will inevitably have far-reaching implications for Turkey's role in the Euro-Atlantic community."<sup>220</sup> By delving into the recent "dramatic fluctuations" in Turkey's policies towards the MENA region, Işıksal, and Göksel's volume proposes an integrated analysis.<sup>221</sup> Although the contributions included in this volume vary in terms of their theoretical and disciplinary approaches, the common thread that binds them is that self-interest and political survival continue to drive Middle Eastern affairs and that the utopian promises of the Arab Uprisings have not changed this reality on the ground. Turkey, they assert, has been squeezed between idealism and realism, and it has gained more when acting as a realist actor, while it has largely failed when acting as an idealist.

According to Park, TFP encompasses all of the above mentioned in the sense that its leadership has gone through a "learning process"<sup>222</sup> in which the ideological stance, vision, and rhetoric of Islamist politicians played a massive role in moving the country away from the early 2000s de-securitization towards the search for "precious loneliness." However, the latter ended with a re-securitization process that altered its relationships with traditional allies. It favored a "strategic drift"<sup>223</sup> that is "autonomous, ideological, principled, nationalistic, assertive, uncompromising, self-confident and self-righteous."<sup>224</sup>

At the same time, there are other interpretations of the meaning and the main features of the drastic changes that occurred in TFP. For instance, although it recognizes a "radical shift," Aka states

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<sup>218</sup> Singer, J. D. (1961). The level-of-analysis problem in international relations. *World Politics*, 14(1), 77-92.

<sup>219</sup> Sözen, 2010, 103.

<sup>220</sup> Cornell, S. E. (2012). What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy? *Middle East Quarterly*, 13-24.

<sup>221</sup> Işıksal, H., & Göksel, O. (Eds.). (2018). *Turkey's Relations with the Middle East*. Springer International Publishing.

<sup>222</sup> Park, B. (2014). Turkey's New (De)Security Policy: Axis Shift, Gaullism, or Learning Process. In A. M. Dorman & J. P. Kaufman (Eds.), *Providing for national security: A comparative analysis* (pp. 254-270). Stanford Security Studies, an imprint of Stanford University Press.

<sup>223</sup> The term is frequently utilized in the US to state the idea that the West is losing Turkey and that the latter is following its own nationalistic course. Flanagan et al., 2020.

<sup>224</sup> Park, B. (2015). Turkey's isolated stance: An ally no more, or just the usual turbulence? *International Affairs*, 91(3), 581-600.

that in the post-2008 period, Turkey tried to renew its foreign policy paradigm rather than revise it.<sup>225</sup> Accordingly, he sees systemic changes in the international balance of power after 9/11 as having caused Turkey to adopt a “new complementary alliance model that is mutually beneficial to itself and its allies and set an appropriate foreign policy vision.” However, he also admits that Turkey has not reached its foreign policy vision because the gap between its capacity and foreign policy ambitions has remained unchanged.<sup>226</sup>

An interesting work specifically addressing the significance of “change” in TFP is Cop and Zihnioglu’s attempt to make sense of its frequent “twists and turns.”<sup>227</sup> Following the continuum set by Herman’s model to address foreign policy change<sup>228</sup>, they confirm that, at different times, TFP has lived through three phases: minor adjustment changes that reflect the change in the level of effort; program changes implying a change in the means and methods used to address a goal/problem; and problem/goal changes meaning changes in goals and objectives. However, they do not find confirmation whether Turkey’s bid for regional leadership and the policies it has followed during the last decade account for an international orientation change – in other words, the highest form of foreign policy change.

As surveyed in the previous introductory sections, another front of the debate is on the periodization of the changes in TFP. Yet, it is not just about the timeframe of each span of change but also about the categorization of this change. While some refer to international developments (e.g., Cold War, 9/11, Arab Uprisings, multipolar order) 234 as benchmarks, others categorize foreign policy by linking the impact of its transformation with these external changes (e.g., Europeanization, autocratization, imperialization, isolation, survival).<sup>229</sup>

Last, one central question revolves around whether “change” in TFP is guided by pragmatism or ideology as the primary determinant and whether it should be read by all looking for a fresh and stimulating take on Turkey’s response to globalization and the internationalization of security in the twenty-first century, or on its domestic alterations at different levels.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Aka, 2014.

<sup>226</sup> Aka, 2014, 69

<sup>227</sup> Cop, B., & Zihnioglu, Ö. (2017). Turkish Foreign Policy under AKP Rule: Making Sense of the Turbulence. *Political Studies Review*, 15(1), 28–38.

<sup>228</sup> Hermann, 1990.

<sup>229</sup> See for instance, Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). The Five Phases of Turkey’s Foreign Policy under the AKP. *The New School Sociala Research*, 88(2), 243–270. For an interesting debate on a longer timeframe, see Oğuzlu & Han. 2023.

<sup>230</sup> Oktav, Ö. Z. (Ed.). (2016). *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Among studies giving prominence to the external level, neorealist theses are dominant in asserting that systemic and structural alterations are the main determinants in redefining the historical and cultural dimension in TFP, questioning its traditional paradigms with alternative perspectives of expanded strategic interests.<sup>231</sup> Tarik Oğuzlu, a prominent exponent – but also an eclectic critic – of the Turkish realist school, argues that there is a close relationship between the anarchical structure of the international system/order, the influence of the distribution of material power capabilities among states at a given time on their foreign policy choices, and how states define their foreign policy interests and then act accordingly.<sup>232</sup> The main contention in the neorealist camp is that TFP performance since 2002 can be partially read as an effort to adapt to external developments at international and regional levels. As the international system has evolved from a “unipolar US-led order into a post-unipolar era, Turkey has accelerated its efforts to pursue a more multi-dimensional and multi-directional foreign approach.”<sup>233</sup>

Before delving into details, it is important to stress why these accounts have been dominant for a long time, especially within Turkish academia. As Köstem notes:

Contrary to the prevalence of diplomatic history and international law in the *Mülkiye* tradition – IR departments whose curricula are influenced by North American or British systems – tend to prioritize teaching theory without empirics. Thus, this method of teaching IR theories in Turkey results in graduate students and junior academics interpreting all research questions, puzzles, and thematic issues of real-world international and global politics within dogmatic grand-theoretical lenses.<sup>234</sup>

Overall, one can affirm that this is related to the idea that TFP has always adhered to a *Realpolitik* paradigm. Indeed, neo-realism is one of the most well-used paradigms in studying world politics and foreign policy. Like its forebear (realism), neo-realism focuses on power, recognizing that maintaining and securing power is a chief aim of states under conditions of anarchy and, subsequently, that power capabilities – chiefly defined in military or economic terms – enable or constrain state behaviour. Neorealism’s chief insight is that the power distribution in the international system among great powers provides an overarching structure to the system and conditions the behavior of states.<sup>235</sup> Neorealism attributes a degree of explanatory power to how material power in the international system is distributed among states at a given time. Whether the system is unipolar,

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<sup>231</sup> Kubicek et al., 2016.

<sup>232</sup> Oğuzlu, H. T. (2023). Turkey as a restrained middle power. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 673–690.

<sup>233</sup> Oğuzlu & Han, 2023, 59

<sup>234</sup> Köstem, S. (2015). International Relations Theories and Turkish International Relations: Observations Based on a Book. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 4(1), 59–59.

<sup>235</sup> The locus classicus for neo-realism remains Waltz, K. N. (2010). *Theory of international politics* (Reiss). Waveland Press.

The most prominent articulation of this position, in particular the dangers of the rise of China, is Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). *The tragedy of great power politics* (Updated edition). W.W. Norton & Company.

bipolar, or multipolar would have an immense impact on how countries define their international orientation.<sup>236</sup>

According to Sayarı,<sup>237</sup> in the 1990s, Turkey modified some of its established republican foreign policy principles and undertook new initiatives to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War era, in which the bipolar competition between superpowers assumed the contours of a multiregional competition that began to include (and affect) other regional actors. Although he recognizes that TFP was significantly more activist and assertive in the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, Sayarı underscores that it did not imply the abandonment of moderation and caution that has traditionally characterized Turkey's approach to international and regional affairs. On some issues, particularly those concerning northern Iraq and Syria, Turkey adopted daring policies that carried considerable risk. On others, however, including its response to the ethnonational conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus, Turkish activism was noticeably cautious and moderate despite considerable domestic pressure for more excellent military aid to beleaguered Muslim and Turkic communities.<sup>238</sup> From Ersoy's realist viewpoint, Turkey's "new" foreign policy made perfect sense as it tried to adjust to an anarchic region rife with conflict and fierce rivalry.<sup>239</sup> From this point of view, regardless of the AKP's ideological roots or the intellectual background of its figures, Turkish politicians have been acting according to the principles of survival and self-help to maximize Turkey's national interest. Accordingly, this new policy heralds a return to the traditional balance of power politics with substantial emphasis on non-traditional aspects of foreign policy. Similarly, Yeşiltaş argues that Turkey's response to the 2003 Iraq War epitomizes soft balancing theory, employing diplomatic, institutional, and territorial strategies to safeguard regional stability and enhance influence vis-a-vis significant powers like the US.<sup>240</sup>

However, in light of the reversal of some of Turkey's ambitions after 2011, the realist camp has debated the reasons behind these additional shifts. For instance, many highlight Turkey's strategic recalibration from de-securitization and Europeanization towards a more security-centric paradigm, prioritizing hard power tools over economic considerations in response to evolving regional and global dynamics.<sup>241</sup> This view is also underscored by think tanks and researchers close to

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<sup>236</sup> The distribution of material power capability among states determines the limits of what they could potentially achieve in their foreign policies. Countries, depending on their power capacities, know (should know) how far they could go in terms of their foreign policy ambitions. Countries with different power capabilities would logically end up defining their foreign policy interests differently.

<sup>237</sup> Sayarı, 2000.

<sup>238</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>239</sup> Eyüp, E. (2016). Realizm. In R. Gözen (Ed.), *Uluslararası ilişkiler teorileri* (3. baskı). İletişim Yayınları.

<sup>240</sup> Yeşiltaş, M. (2009). Soft Balancing in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Case of the 2003 Iraq War. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 14(1), 25–51.

<sup>241</sup> Lami, B. (2018). Recalibration of Turkish Foreign Policy During AKP Era. *CEJISS*, 12(3), 35–36; Aknur, M., & Durmuşlar, T. (2019). Turkey's changing security environment and transformation of Turkish foreign policy. *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 21(4), 1355–1376.

governmental circles.<sup>242</sup> For instance, in addressing TFP in its centennial, Gümüş states that “changing regional context in the Middle East and North Africa and changes in Türkiye’s relations with the regional and global actors made its shift in foreign policy inevitable. The increasing realism and hard power used in foreign policy were necessary to deal with the changing external conditions.”<sup>243</sup>

This has also impacted the way Turkey has elaborated a more flexible conception of its alliances. Dolatabadi et al. argue that Turkey’s behavior conforms to the principles of offensive realism, i.e., ideology, policy toward domestic minorities, policy toward weak neighbors, and military and arms control policy.<sup>244</sup> This policy of the increasing pursuit of power maximization in its efforts to secure its power status – and not necessarily to rely on alliances and a balance of power as before – can and has influenced the behavior of other actors in the Middle East and beyond. Yılmaz examines Turkish foreign policy through a neorealist lens, focusing on bilateral relations since 2016.<sup>245</sup> He argues that Turkey has adhered to a neorealist framework in its alliances, driven by systemic structures domestically and externally. This approach reflects Turkey’s efforts to assert itself as a regional power while safeguarding its security, political, and social interests.

Concerning how neorealism can operate along longer historical timeframes, Oğuzlu states that, unlike other theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of individual and domestic level factors, neorealism would appear to offer a more generalized and bird’s eye perspective on foreign policy trends of countries for a given period. Rather than dealing with a single case or a very narrowly specified period, “neorealism seems to be a better indicator in offering mid-to-long-term foreign policy trends, predispositions, and orientations.”<sup>246</sup> Therefore, the main reason why such a certain periodization is offered is that the periods under consideration neatly reflect the changes in the balance of power dynamics in the international political environment. However, he also recognizes that this in no way suggests that this is the most appropriate periodical classification and

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<sup>242</sup> The most visible is SETA. To cite a few, Aral, B. (2019). “The World is Bigger than Five”: A Salutary Manifesto of Turkey’s New International Outlook. *Insight Turkey*, 21(4). Ardiç, N. (2014). Civilizational Discourse, the ‘Alliance of Civilizations’ and Turkish Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 16(3), 101–122. Ataman, M. (2023). The Century of Türkiye: A New Foreign Policy Vision for Building the Türkiye Axis. *Insight Turkey*, 25(Summer 2023), 73–96; Bakir, A. (2023). Post-Ottoman Legacy in the Middle East: A Compendium of 100 Years of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 25(Summer 2023), 37–50; Tanchum, M. (2020). A Logic Beyond Lausanne: A Geopolitical Perspective on the Congruence between Turkey’s New Hard Power and its Strategic Reorientation. *Insight Turkey*, 22(Summer 2020), 41–45; Yükselen, H. (2021). Exploring the Traits of a Grand Strategy for Turkey: Resilience, Protean Power, and Connectography. *Insight Turkey*, 23(Fall 2021), 77–94.

<sup>243</sup> Gümüş, A. (2022). Increasing Realism in Turkish Foreign Policy during Post-Davutoğlu Era. *Insight Turkey*, 24(Fall 2022).

<sup>244</sup> Dolatabadi, A. B., & Rezaei, R. (2022). Erdogan Endless Dreams: The Theoretical and Operational Framework of Turkey’s New Foreign Policy. *World Affairs*, 185(1), 114–146.

<sup>245</sup> Yılmaz, E. A. (2021). Turkish Foreign Policy in a Neorealist Framework: Bilateral Relations Since 2016. *Middle East Policy*, 28(3–4), 144–158.

<sup>246</sup> Oğuzlu & Han, 61.

that it has nothing to do in particular with the peculiarities of Turkish foreign policy. Moreover, the same author makes an interesting point by asserting that there is no direct causation between the independent variable of systemic factors and the dependent variable of Turkey's foreign policy performance. As a consequence, he understands the external environment as a context in which Turkish decision-makers have responded to Turkey's responses to foreign policy developments. He underlines the importance of the external environment as a "set of constraints and opportunities," which has not only helped the ruling elites fulfill their domestic political agenda, particularly during the first decade of the twenty-first century but has also had a role in forming the preferences and behaviors of TFP.<sup>247</sup>

#### **1.4.2. Defining Turkey's Kind of Power**

This context helps introduce another category under which TFP is studied. Besides the nuances due to unclear definitions, many studies consider Turkey a middle power in international politics. This identity is attributed to Turkey's material power capacity – compared to more powerful great powers and less powerful small powers – and Turkey's decades-old geopolitical vision of striking the right balance among the great powers so that Turkey could follow a multidimensional and multidirectional foreign policy orientation. In general, the primary consideration is that, depending on the nature of the external environment at systemic and regional levels, whether it is cooperative or conflictual, or whether it is based on unipolarity, bipolarity, or multipolarity, Turkey's ability to define its foreign policy interests from a narrower or broader perspective has varied. Turkey's maneuvering capability in its foreign policy has been decisively shaped by whether the external environment was permissive or constraining. With this background in mind, it is interesting to note how studies on Turkey's "middle powerness" have evolved in the last two decades.

Indeed, at least until the early 2010s, many analyses stressed that while Turkey shared the characteristic of growing material capabilities with other rising powers, its status in international politics remained more connected to its institutionalized and strategic relations with the West.<sup>248</sup> According to this view, despite specific problems with Western actors, Turkey acted as a "good

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<sup>247</sup> Oğuzlu, H. T. (2019). Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 9(1), 127.

<sup>248</sup> See Öniş, Z., & Yilmaz, Ş. (2009). Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era. *Turkish Studies*, 10(1), 7–24; Kirişçi, K. (2009). The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 40, 29–56; Parlar Dal, E. (2013). Assessing Turkey's "Normative" Power in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and their Limitations. *Turkish Studies*, 14(4), 709–734.



citizen of liberal international order”<sup>249</sup>, seeking to expand its relations with its broad neighborhood without detaching from the West. Its foreign policy initiatives showed that Turkey strove to position itself as a proactive “benign regional power,” capitalizing on its geopolitical identity as an interlocutor between West and East.<sup>250</sup> Looking at some of the most comprehensive studies on the topic, one can easily detect that the main discussions were on the extensions of TFP beyond the confines of the immediate neighborhood to locate the country as a global middle power role based on economic engagement, humanitarian and developmental assistance, and impartial mediation of disagreements.<sup>251</sup> According to Parlar Dal, there was a strong correlation between Turkey’s rising power status on the international scene and the increasing importance of “the normative” in its foreign policy.<sup>252</sup> As such, Turkey emphasized interaction and interdependence among states to promote a “sense of global and regional responsibility.” For her, Turkey’s most crucial feature of its normative foreign policy approach was its duality, which means that it tends to spread EU norms – most of which are also considered universal – and its norms to third countries.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, as pointed out elsewhere, although Turkish leaders were openly seeking a redistribution of power among states in the existing international global order, as a rising power institutionally located within the Western-centered neoliberal world order, Turkey’s demand for revisionism in the international system was relatively modest compared to that of the BRICS and other similar powers.<sup>254</sup>

However, all these definitions have undergone significant amendments since the mid-2010s. As many authors have stressed, although Turkey’s capabilities did not change dramatically, its foreign policy behavior did. Indeed, many argue that since 2011, Turkey has primarily abandoned benign foreign policy (good international citizenship, conflict mediation, multilateralism) in favor of a more revisionist one<sup>255</sup> that aspires to more independence in its foreign policy actions and acts more assertively, heavily, though not exclusively, relying on coercive means. According to Sucu et al., it is possible to present the interconnected factors limiting the role of Turkey as a middle power in the following list: (1) uncertainty and international insecurity caused by the decline of the US hegemony and the intensification of hegemonic competition; (2) the aftermath of the Arab Spring, which made

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<sup>249</sup> Kutlay, M., & Öniş, Z. (2021). Understanding oscillations in Turkish foreign policy: Pathways to unusual middle power activism. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(12), 3052; Keyman, E. F., & Gumuscu, S. (2014). *Democracy, Identity, and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Hegemony through Transformation*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 14.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Bayer, R., & Keyman, E. F. (2012). Turkey: An Emerging Hub of Globalization and Internationalist Humanitarian Actor? *Globalizations*, 9(1), 73–90; Levaggi, A. G., & Yilmaz, S. (2019). The precarious role of emerging powers in a transforming international order: The Brazilian and Turkish initiative for a nuclear deal with Iran. *International Politics*, 56(4), 457–476.

<sup>252</sup> Parlar Dal, Emel. 2013.

<sup>253</sup> Idem.

<sup>254</sup> Parlar Dal, Emel, ed. 2018. *Middle Powers in Global Governance: The Rise of Turkey*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

<sup>255</sup> Kirişçi, 2009; Öniş, Z., & Kutlay, M. (2017). The dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: The paradoxical case of Turkey. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71(2), 164–183; Özpek, B. B., & Tanriverdi Yaşar, N. (2018). Populism and foreign policy in Turkey under the AKP rule. *Turkish Studies*, 19(2), 198–216.

Turkey reconsider its foreign policy and influenced domestic politics as well; (3) debilitation of domestic institutions (system of checks and balances) accompanied by the rise of right-wing nationalism; (4) the growing influence of hegemonic identities (Neo-Ottomanism, PanTurkism/Pan-Turanism/Pan-Islamism) and the demise of Westernism, which fueled Turkish aspirations for regional hegemony and leadership in the Muslim world.”<sup>256</sup> Similarly, it has been highlighted how on the path to becoming an “order-instituting” actor in the Middle East, Turkey has faltered poignantly and retreated to become just a “disorder-navigating” actor. One crucial dynamic, as it appears from the Turkish experience in the Middle East, concerns the incongruence between overestimated foreign policy objectives and the capabilities required to realize them.<sup>257</sup>

It is in this context that new definitions have recently emerged. For instance, Oğuzlu defines Turkey as a restrained middle power (RMP).<sup>258</sup> Accordingly, during such great upheavals, polarization, and uncertainties, countries of middle and lesser power capabilities find it difficult to navigate their way. Contrary to its precedent objective of an “overambitious middle power” (OMP), the argument is that adopting an RMP strategy would better suit Turkish national interests. Rather than putting leadership at the center of its regional engagements and aspiring to become a *Realpolitik* great power akin to Russia and China, Turkey’s leaders would do much better to focus their attention on preserving Turkey’s territorial security, economic prosperity, and societal cohesion.<sup>259</sup> In line with the understanding for which Turkey is developing a strategic vision for an ever more turbulent, tumultuous global order increasingly characterized by multi-polarity<sup>260</sup>, what can be considered Turkey’s strategic White Book proposes the idea of a “third power” that adopts a “neighborly core doctrine” to keep great powers’ military forces out of its immediate neighborhood and, if possible, seek integration with its immediate neighbors through bilateral or multilateral economic, political and security initiatives.”<sup>261</sup>

### 1.4.3. Liberal and Institutionalist Approaches to TFP

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<sup>256</sup> Sucu, A. E., Safranchuk, I., Nesmashnyi, A., & Iskandarov, Q. (2021). Transformation of Middle Powers with the Decline of World Hegemony: The Case of Turkey. *Strategic Analysis*, 45(4), 313.

<sup>257</sup> Gürzel, A., & Ersoy, E. (2020). From Regionalism to Realpolitik. In G. Giacomello & B. Verbek (Eds.), *Middle Powers in Asia and Europe in the 21st Century* (pp. 119–136). Lexington Books.

<sup>258</sup> Oğuzlu, 2023.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>260</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 2020.

<sup>261</sup> Aktürk, Ş. (2020). Debating Turkey’s Grand Strategy. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 25(2).

The outputs in Turkish politics and foreign policy have also manifested the neoliberal globalization trends since the 1980s. They are commonly explained through the impact of economy and trade and with the concepts of Liberalism, including “transnational interactions” and “complex interdependency.”<sup>262</sup> According to Keyder (1987)<sup>263</sup>, the modern Turkish state has evolved within the framework of global capitalist development and has followed the main trajectories of global capitalism as well as its domestic power struggles and social forces. Among the few scholars focusing on the economic drivers of the Republic’s foreign policy, Kirişçi (2009) utilizes Rosecrance’s “trading state” argument<sup>264</sup> and Putnam’s “two-level games”<sup>265</sup> to explain Turkey’s foreign policy in the twenty-first century. In addition, Kutlay (2011) utilizes functionalist and interdependence approaches to analyze Turkish foreign policy and suggests that “bifurcation within the financial capital in Turkey in the post-2001 period and the internationalization of the ‘Anatolian tigers’ have turned out to be the ‘practical hand’ of Turkish foreign policy”.<sup>266</sup> Similarly, Altay analyzes the increasing role of business associations in helping shape Turkey’s foreign policy<sup>267</sup> and its regional partnerships. A similar discourse that was both in vogue among scholars and promoted by the government’s narrative was the possibility of Turkey being an “energy hub” between different regions.<sup>268</sup>

Another variant of Liberalism suggests a relationship between the domestic governance principles of liberal democracies and foreign policy. For instance, Keyman and Gümüşçü argue that “the modernization process generated center-periphery cleavages, such as the democratization process generated left-right cleavages, the globalization process generated global-national cleavages, and the Europeanization process generated identity-citizenship cleavages” all of which have their footprints on Turkish foreign policy.<sup>269</sup> Similarly, Keyman<sup>270</sup> claims that in addition to geopolitics, “modernity and democracy” did those democratic values shape Turkish foreign policymaking. Still,

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<sup>262</sup> Nye, J. S., & Keohane, R. O. (1971). Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction. *International Organization*, 25(3), 329–349.

<sup>263</sup> Keyder, Ç. (1987). *State and class in Turkey: A study in capitalist development*. Verso.

<sup>264</sup> Kirişçi, 2009. See also Rosecrance, R. N. (1986). *The rise of the trading state: Commerce and conquest in the modern world*. Basic Books.

<sup>265</sup> Putnam, Robert D. 1988. “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games.” *International Organization* 42 (3): 427–60.

<sup>266</sup> Kutlay, M. (2011). *Economy as the ‘Practical Hand’ of ‘New Turkish Foreign Policy’: A Political Economy Explanation*. 13(1), 67. Anatolian Tigers refers to the emergence of the Islamic capital (green capital sometimes) in Turkey, namely the rise of businessmen and enterprises from conservative-religious circles that took advantage of the 1980s and 2000a Turkey’s economic and trade expansion, boosted by ad hoc policies of likeminded governments. See, Demir, Ö., Acar, M., & Toprak, M. (2004). Anatolian Tigers or Islamic Capital: Prospects and Challenges. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(6), 166–188.

<sup>267</sup> Altay. (2011). Businessmen as Diplomats: The Role of Business Associations in Turkey’s Foreign Economic Policy. 13(1).

<sup>268</sup> Coşkun, B. B., & Carlson, R. (2010). *New Energy Geopolitics: Why does Turkey Matter?* 12(3), 205–220; Wigen, E. (2012). Pipe Dreams or Dream Pipe? Turkey’s Hopes of Becoming an Energy Hub. *The Middle East Journal*, 66(4), 598–612.

<sup>269</sup> Keyman, & Gumuscu, 2014.

<sup>270</sup> Keyman, E. F. (2009). Globalization, modernity and democracy: In search of a viable domestic polity for a sustainable Turkish foreign policy. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 40, 7–27.

the spread of those values to the Middle East and its Ottoman legacies became the objective of Turkish foreign policy throughout the early 2000s, which ultimately failed in the second half of the 2010s. Kösebalaban<sup>271</sup> explains this failure as a result of the embeddedness of “democracy and Islam” in AKP’s foreign policy choices. A final variant of liberalism necessary for this work is liberal intergovernmentalism or embedded liberalism 280, which posits the importance of international institutions and global regimes in state action.

All of those mentioned above contributed to inflating, until the early 2010s, the idea of a “Turkish Model” that could blend a new moderate form of democratic Islam with a rising market-oriented economy. From academia to governmental circles<sup>272</sup>, the shared idea was that expanded soft power tools in multiple regions and internal liberalization reforms could foster the country’s engagement in Europe and Western organizations based on its Western identity and, at the same time, promote its active involvement in the Islamic world based on the country’s Muslim identity. Moreover, even liberal circles underscored the emergence of Turkey as a peacemaker that could pave the way for the emergence of regional solutions to regional problems.<sup>273</sup> Apart from some limited researchers that questioned the concrete sustainability of the Turkish Model<sup>274</sup>, the debate was more concentrated on the capacity of Arab/Muslim countries to replicate the same experience and on the acceptance of the West for the possibility of stable and robust governments in the Middle East.

Against this background, though adopting similar disciplinary and theoretical approaches, recent analyses have painted a different picture of the efficacy of Turkey’s soft power and model status. According to Çevik, Turkey’s soft power capacity has diminished, especially in the West, due to its democratic backsliding, challenging the previous narrative of its expanding influence.<sup>275</sup> Tuğal argues that the Turkish model of Islamic liberalism, once hailed as a potential universal model, has failed, attributing its demise to inherent flaws rather than merely Erdoğan’s authoritarianism and highlighting how it was context-specific and unable to be universally applied.<sup>276</sup> Similarly, Aydın-

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<sup>271</sup> Kösebalaban, 2011, 93.

<sup>272</sup> In the governmental circles the role of the AKP party was more emphasized with the idea that “the country itself is not the only model, Turkey’s current ruling party, the AKP is also one.” According to Kaddorah, the AKP has its roots in the Islamic political movements of Turkey but has succeeded in developing a new modern ideology and program as well as practicing politics “under the strict secular constraints of the Turkish legal and political system.” Despite the AKP’s strong ties with the West and its support for Turkey’s full membership in the European Union, it has also reoriented Turkey towards its neighborhood, the Islamic world, where it can play an influential role. Kaddorah, E. (2010). The Turkish Model: Acceptability and Apprehension. *Insight Turkey*, 12(4), 115.

<sup>273</sup> Aras, B. (2009). Turkey’s rise in the Greater Middle East: Peace-building in the periphery. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 11(1), 41.

<sup>274</sup> Altunışık, M. B. (2005). The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 27(1/2), 45–63.

<sup>275</sup> Çevik, S. B. (2019). Reassessing Turkey’s Soft Power: The Rules of Attraction. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 44(1), 50–71.

<sup>276</sup> Tuğal, C. (2016). The fall of the Turkish model: How the Arab uprisings brought down Islamic liberalism. Verso.

Düzgit and Dandashly highlight how Turkey's influence in the Southern Neighbourhood has waned, with its domestic governance demonized rather than embraced as a norm diffuser.<sup>277</sup>

Öniş and Kutlay sum up all these changes well.<sup>278</sup> First, the up-and-downs of Turkey's domestic political economy in later years led to unproductive foreign engagements, undermining its precedent soft-power capabilities. Second, Turkey represents the “paradox” of an emerging middle power that did not synchronize ambitions with capacities and balance-of-power dynamics. Third, Turkey's inconsistencies between normative rhetoric and action undermined its international credibility and alliance-formation capacity. They suggest that Turkey's recent pursuit of strategic autonomy has led to overambitious policies and external isolation, contradicting the notion of Turkey as a responsible global middle power.<sup>279</sup> Accordingly, Turkey finds itself in a “sub-optimal equilibrium” where its relations with the West are transactional, and dependency on China and Russia is augmented.<sup>280</sup>

#### 1.4.4. Unmaterial Parameters and Critical Approaches

While variants of realism and liberalism give prominence to external, structural, and material elements, the internal-external bond in TFP has also featured many unmaterial and conceptual components, their ideas, ideologies, or political stances. For instance, Yükselen's book elaborates a critical approach that elucidates how Turkey's different foreign policy strategies have not been elaborated in a vacuum.<sup>281</sup> Rather, they are embedded in the social context in which the agents (politicians, decision-makers, and the public) play a significant role in forging discourses and narratives that match (or do not) actual outcomes along different conjunctures. In 2009, Benli Altunışık's research had already provided a nuanced examination of the competing worldviews underpinning Turkish foreign policy. Drawing upon insights from realism, liberalism, and constructivism, she elucidates how these competing worldviews shape policy priorities, diplomatic strategies, and regional aspirations. She argues that these ideas ultimately represent “worldviews as they start with different assumptions about what Turkey is, what the basis of Turkey's interest and

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<sup>277</sup> Aydın-Düzgit, S., & Dandashly, A. (2022). A model no more? Debating Turkish influence in the southern neighbourhood. *Democratization*, 29(3), 451–468.

<sup>278</sup> Kutlay, M., & Öniş, Z. (2021). Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: Strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence? *International Affairs*, 97(4), 1085–1104; Öniş, Z., & Kutlay, M. (2017). The dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: The paradoxical case of Turkey. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71(2), 164–183.

<sup>279</sup> Aydın-Düzgit, S., Kutlay, M., & Keyman, E. F. (2025). Strategic autonomy in Turkish foreign policy in an age of multipolarity: Lineages and contradictions of an idea. *International Politics*.

<sup>280</sup> Öniş, & Kutlay 2017, 170.

<sup>281</sup> Yükselen, H. (2020). *Strategy and Strategic Discourse in Turkish Foreign Policy*. Springer International Publishing.

involvement should be in this region, to what extent Turkey should engage the Middle East, and what the threats and opportunities emanating from the region are.”<sup>282</sup>

It is worth noting, though in a nutshell, that these discrepancies by comparing how studies before and after the Arab Uprisings have differently addressed Turkey’s visions in terms of foreign policy position. In the first case, the publications of Yeşiltaş are illustrative, which stressed the concepts of “discourse of civilization and “politics of restoration.”<sup>283</sup> He emphasizes the increasing significance of civilization in shaping Turkey’s critique of the current international order by discourses that represented a quest for anti-hegemony and pluralism in global affairs. By redefining the concept of civilization as a historical institution rather than a static ideology, Yeşiltaş highlights the notion of a “New Turkey,” provided by the term for the politics of restoration of national, regional, and global order while considering civilization as a historical institution formed by the interaction between culture-economics-politics and a “being-knowledge-values” based mentality.<sup>284</sup> In the same period, Aras referred to a “new geographic imagination” to underscore how recent Turkish policymakers have advanced diverse role conceptions for Turkey, depicting it as a regional leader, protector, global participant, exemplar, and bridge builder” and how these portrayals have consistently translated into Turkey’s external actions.<sup>285</sup> Among all, former Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and his various works epitomized the emergence of this civilizational discourse.<sup>286</sup> As it will be further explored, his view advocates for a proactive foreign policy approach rooted in Turkey’s geopolitical significance, historical heritage, including its Ottoman legacy, and cultural ties, aiming to position Turkey as a central country in regional affairs while also promoting its interests on the global stage.

After 2011, the coincidence of drastic international structural changes with the ones that occurred inside Turkey’s domestic sphere has also prompted value-based speculations about the AKP’s ideological-driven policies. This is evident from the mushrooming of analysis evaluating TFP through constructivist lenses. Unlike realism, which has a materialist ontology, constructivism has an ideational ontology focusing on shared ideas, identity, and norms.<sup>287</sup> The central assumption is that structures themselves do not have inherent meaning or significance; their meanings are constructed

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<sup>282</sup> Altunışık, M. B. (2009). Worldviews and Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 40, 172.

<sup>283</sup> Yeşiltaş, M. (2013). The Transformation of the Geopolitical Vision in Turkish Foreign Policy. *Turkish Studies*, 14(4), 661–687.

<sup>284</sup> Aras, 2009.

<sup>285</sup> Yanık, 2011. See also Kocadal, Ö. (2019). Emerging Power Liminality in Peacebuilding: Turkey’s Mimicry of the Liberal Peace. *International Peacekeeping*, 26(4), 431–45.

<sup>286</sup> Davutoğlu, A. (2014). *Stratejik Derinlik Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu*. Kitap Kağıdı. For a good collection of his visions, see Murinson, A. (2006). The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(6), 945–964.

<sup>287</sup> Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press. It also sees the construction of national identities as a social process in which the state as well as national identities always entail an outside or inside enemy or simply an Other. See Barnett, M. (1993). Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System. *International Studies Quarterly*, 37(3), 271.

and interpreted by actors, giving them more agency. States' interests are not a priori givens or as simple as seeking survival or maximizing power. Instead, they derive from identity/ideational factors; as these factors change, interests can change. Consequently, a country's self-definition would have drastic foreign policy repercussions if that country is ready to follow up its declared principles consistently. Moreover, at least implicitly, it devotes more attention to domestic politics, as who rules matters significantly in constructing or changing a state's identity.

The most prominent strand in this vast (and ever-expanding) literature emphasizes the AKP's Islamic orientation and subsequent turn away from the West and toward the Middle East and broader Muslim world, a development most associated with Davutoğlu's views. Uzer's recent study<sup>288</sup> argues that the shift in Turkey's foreign policy can be explained by using a constructivist approach that focuses on the gradual change in Turkey's identity from a secular Western-oriented identity to that of a religious-based affiliation after 2002 that allows for more unilateralist and activist foreign policy behavior. In general, while some authors noted how the (re)imagination of the Ottoman period was invoked in a benign, multicultural manner to foster inter-civilizational dialogue (e.g., the Alliance of Civilizations initiative),<sup>289</sup> others (typically writing more recently) see the rise of Turkey's Islamic identity as empowering nativist authoritarians and legitimizing civilizational competition eventually reducing any previously affective dimension of relations with the West and new partners to contingent transactionalism. Still others view TFP as more of an epiphenomenon, focusing on how debates over and shifts in foreign policy are driven by domestic political disputes, utilized to legitimize a particular domestic agenda or to take the battle over Turkish identity 'outside' into the foreign policy arena.<sup>290</sup> For instance, while Gürpınar sees foreign policy as a "contested front of the cultural wars"<sup>291</sup>, others evaluate AKP's reversals as fruits of Turkey's ambivalent self, ontological insecurity in "which Erdoğanism emerged in contrast (yet, within the structures and discourses) of Kemalism."<sup>292</sup> Finally, Aydıntaşbaş refers to Turkey's self-imagination as its special *Sonderweg*, in which AKP's idea of a "New Turkey" underscores the country's exceptionality in the global context between an imperial past and resurgent ambitions.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Uzer, U. (2021). Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy: What Can International Relations Theory Offer? *The Review of International Affairs*, 72(1181), 5–22.

<sup>289</sup> Yanık, 2011; Çınar, M. (2018). Turkey's 'Western' or 'Muslim' identity and the AKP's civilizational discourse. *Turkish Studies*, 19(2), 176–197.

<sup>290</sup> Hintz, 2016; Başer, 2015; Özpek & Tanrıverdi Yaşar, 2018; Coskun, B. B., Doğan, S., & Demir, M. (2017). Foreign Policy as Legitimation Strategy for the AKP's Hegemonic Project of the 'New Turkey.' In B. Baser & A. E. Öztürk (Eds.), *Authoritarian politics in Turkey: Elections, resistance and the AKP*. I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

<sup>291</sup> Gürpınar, D. (2020). Foreign policy as a contested front of the cultural wars in Turkey: The Middle East and Turkey in the era of the AKP. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 17(65), 3–21.

<sup>292</sup> Gülsah Çapan, Z., & Zarakol, A. (2019). Turkey's ambivalent self: ontological insecurity in 'Kemalism' versus 'Erdoğanism'. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(3), 263–282.

<sup>293</sup> Aydıntaşbaş, A. (2020). The Turkish *Sonderweg*: Erdoğan's New Turkey and its Role in the Global Order. *IPC-Mercator*.

In general, it is worth noting that whereas “Islamic” or “Neo-Ottoman” are the most frequently invoked identities in the AKP era<sup>294</sup>, there are other cultural (Eurasianist<sup>295</sup>, panTurkist)<sup>296</sup> and political (populist) ones that have been embraced by Turkish political actors and have arguably exercised some influence over TFP.<sup>297</sup> Moreover, Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili note that constructivist approaches have been helpful in showing how and when identity matters in the EU’s stance toward Turkish accession and, more recently, how it impacts Turkey’s policies toward Europe through shaping the Turkish elite and public conceptions of identity.<sup>298</sup> They also show how constructivism helps explain Turkey’s contestation of the EU’s development policy in sub-Saharan Africa and how Turkey has presented itself as a “virtuous actor” in the region as opposed to “neocolonial Europe.”<sup>299</sup> However, as Kubicek notes, “while constructivist and ideational perspectives offer more contextually-contingent explanations and address some of the problems associated with structural approaches, they are not without their own shortcomings.”<sup>300</sup> Often, they de-emphasize critical questions about why particular ideas/identities/discourses take hold at a particular time – to which a neo-realist might retort that the constructivist “super-structure” is merely a reflection of the material (power) base. In this respect, it seems safe to state that “constructivism might be more a method or approach than a full-blown causal theory, capable of describing and even analyzing processes but harder-pressed to isolate variables and develop testable hypotheses.”<sup>301</sup>

#### **1.4.5. Case-Specific Approaches to TFP: Areas of Interest, Relations, and Individuals**

Building on these contrasts, some recent enlightening works have well documented how “domestic politics, economic performances, and foreign policy impinged on one another in an

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<sup>294</sup> Başkan, B., & Taşpınar, Ö. (2021). *The nation or the ummah: Islamism and Turkish foreign policy*. Suny Press; Uzer, U. (2020). Conservative Narrative: Contemporary Neo-Ottomanist Approaches in Turkish Politics. *Middle East Critique*, 29(3), 275–290; Wastnidge, E. (2019). Imperial grandeur and selective memory: re-assessing neo-Ottomanism in Turkish foreign and domestic politics. *Middle East Critique*, 28(1), 7-28; Danforth, N. (2014). Multi-Purpose Empire: Ottoman History in Republican Turkey. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50(4), 655–678.

<sup>295</sup> Erşen, E., & Köstem, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order*. Routledge.

<sup>296</sup> Sengupta, A. (2014). Eurasianism or Neo-Ottomanism: The Neighborhood in Turkish Foreign Policy. In A. Sengupta, *Myth and Rhetoric of the Turkish Model* (pp. 75–100). Springer India.

<sup>297</sup> Atmaca, A. Ö., & Torun, Z. (2022). Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 24(1), 114–137; Köstem, S. (2016). When Can Idea Entrepreneurs Influence Foreign Policy? Explaining the Rise of the “Turkic World” in Turkish Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 722–740.

<sup>298</sup> Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2020.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 745.

<sup>300</sup> Kubicek, 2022, 652.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 647.



interactive manner,” which could better demonstrate in what way TFP’s activism represents a critical case reflecting both the underlying potential and imminent constraints of emerging middle powers.<sup>302</sup> Indeed, an important consideration is that TFP is not exempt from the structure-agency dilemma because there are divergences about “which variables matter the most” in decision-making. This undoubtedly stems from the relationship between domestic and foreign policy-making processes developing on a more mutable path that overlaps with changes occurring at lower levels. Therefore, scholars debate on how to comprehend and to what extent, in the last decades, Turkey’s posture and its external perception have been evolving in terms of a reformed attitude over geopolitical, strategical, soft power, and economic questions, together with peculiar dynamics revolving around domestic politics, ideology, and leadership accounts. Therefore, starting with AKP’s authoritarian turn in 2013 through the post-2016 failed coup until more recent institutional and domestic developments, many authors have adopted new interpretative lenses, disciplinary approaches, and analytical categories to trace the linkages between the internal and external dimensions of TFP.

Dalacoura has underscored the passage from a “civilizational” foreign policy to a more “transactional,” unplanned, ad hoc type of foreign policy based on “expediency.”<sup>303</sup> In this sense, while the ideological preferences of the AKP government are still significant, as Turkey finds itself in internal and external crises, the interests and survival of the ruling party are increasingly paramount. In another study, Sezal and Sezal assert that the AKP’s neo-Ottomanism as a foreign policy orientation became an instrument to legitimize its Islamist policies and anti-secular transformation.<sup>304</sup> In the same vein, Saraçoğlu and Demirkol claim the AKP’s concept of nation and nationalism is primarily produced by its neo-Ottomanist foreign policy.<sup>305</sup> Similarly, Günay examines foreign policy as a source of legitimation for “competitive authoritarian regimes.”<sup>306</sup> Bayulgen, Arbatli, and Canbolat also recognize the impact of geopolitical conditions on elite survival strategies to explain the authoritarian turn and resilience.<sup>307</sup> Kara underscores how, in the post-2016 failed coup period, to discredit domestic adversaries, unify the public, legitimize leadership positions, and

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<sup>302</sup> Öniş, Z., & Kutlay, M. (2017). The dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: the paradoxical case of Turkey. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71(2), 164–183; Donelli, F. (2020). *Explaining the Role of Intervening Variables in Turkey’s Foreign Policy Behaviour* (1.0) [Dataset]. University of Salento; Haugom, L. (2019). Turkish foreign policy under Erdoğan: A change in international orientation? *Comparative Strategy*, 38(3), 206–223; Kara, M. (2022). Linking Turkey’s domestic politics and foreign policy: The Justice and Development Party’s political strategies and their divergent foreign policy effects. *Turkish Studies*, 23(4), 529–553.

<sup>303</sup> Dalacoura, 2017, 3.

<sup>304</sup> Sezal, M. A., & Sezal, İ. (2018). Dark taints on the looking glass: Whither ‘New Turkey’? *Turkish Studies*, 19(2), 217–239.

<sup>305</sup> Saraçoğlu, C., & Demirkol, Ö. (2015). Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(3), 301–319.

<sup>306</sup> Günay, C. (2016). Foreign Policy as a Source of Legitimation for “Competitive Authoritarian Regimes”: The Case of Turkey’s AKP. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 17(2), 39–46. <https://doi.org/10.1353/gia.2016.0023>

<sup>307</sup> Bayulgen, O., Arbatli, E., & Canbolat, S. (2018). Elite Survival Strategies and Authoritarian Reversal in Turkey. *Polity*, 50(3), 333–365.

demonstrate a capacity for maintaining the nation's security, the AKP has adopted a mobilization strategy and manipulated Turkish foreign policy through "diversionary war" and periodically escalated tensions abroad to contain domestic opposition, while diverting public attention from divisive domestic problems to Turkish military activities.<sup>308</sup> Finally, Ege explicitly references how, for the AKP, foreign policy emerged as a potent tool for discrediting, marginalizing, and isolating Kemalism. At the same time, it has continued to pursue similar goals and methods of consolidating state power as observed during the Kemalist period.<sup>309</sup>

In this framework, Beken Saatçioğlu argues that the AKP specifically used the EU reform process as an instrument of political survival, followed by power consolidation after 2007. This explains why, while reforms targeting civilianization vis-à-vis the military persisted over the years, democratic progress in the areas of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms stalled<sup>310</sup>. As such, this last consideration opens up two other elements that cannot be overlooked in the literature.

First is the vast strain of literature on TFP towards Europe regarding identity, policies, and institutional relations. Given that it would be impossible to summarize all of the evaluations for this project's scope, it is still important to note how academic and research publications have dramatically changed their tones and terminologies throughout the years. While, as outlined above, reference to identity issues and historical cleavages pertains to the constructivist camp<sup>311</sup>, a likewise abundant scholarly underscores how Turkey's domestic order has been impacted by the multilayered dynamics entertained with the EU and Europe. At the very beginning of the 2000s, Turkey's ebbs and flows with Europe were still looked through a question of identity, according to which "as Europe reinvents itself along ethnic, cultural, and to a certain extent, racial lines, Turkey's hopes for full membership in the EU are far from being materialized because of questions regarding Turkey's Europeaness."<sup>312</sup> In the context of increased cordial relations, Müftüler-Baç and Gürsoy's research<sup>313</sup> was among the first ones to empirically recognize that since 1999, there has been a gradual Europeanization of TFP,

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<sup>308</sup> Coşkun et al. (2017, 89) argue that the AKP used its foreign policy to weaken 'the Kemalist establishment's institutional stronghold within the Turkish state' and 'mobilize popular opinion.' See also Tziarras, Z. (2018). Erdoganist authoritarianism and the 'new' Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(4), 597.

<sup>309</sup> Ege, A. (2022). Foreign policy as a means of the AKP's struggle with Kemalism in relation to domestic variables. *Turkish Studies*, 23(4), 554–575.

<sup>310</sup> Saatçioğlu, B. (2020). The European Union's refugee crisis and rising functionalism in EU-Turkey relations. *Turkish Studies*, 21(2), 169–187.

<sup>311</sup> Rumelili, B. (2004). Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU's Mode of Differentiation. *Review of International Studies*, 30(1), 27–47; Bilgin, P., & Bilgic, A. (2012). Turkey and EU/rope: Discourses of Inspiration/Anxiety in Turkey's Foreign Policy. *Review of European Studies*, 4(3), 111–124; Ertuğrul, K., & Akcalı Yılmaz, Ö. (2018). The Otherness of Turkey in European Integration. *Turkish Studies*, 19(1), 48–71; Tetik, M. O. (2021). Discursive reconstruction of civilisational-self: Turkish national identity and the European Union (2002–2017). *European Politics and Society*, 22(3), 374–393.

<sup>312</sup> Müftüler-Baç, M. (2000). Through the looking glass: Turkey in Europe. *Turkish Studies*, 1(1), 21–35.

<sup>313</sup> Müftüler-Baç, M., & Gürsoy, Y. (2010). Is There a Europeanization of Turkish Foreign Policy? An Addendum to the Literature on EU Candidates. *Turkish Studies*, 11(3), 405–427.

specifically in the increased use of diplomatic and economic instruments, and in the procedural changes that prompted visible reforms in the civil-military relations in domestic policymaking with significant reflection into Turkey's foreign policy-making arena. Similarly, analyzing the impact of Europeanization on Turkish political Parties, Öniş remarks on the paradoxes for which “in the post-Helsinki era, Turkish politics can be better understood as a clash between globalists and defensive nationalists, transcending the traditional left-right political divide.”<sup>314</sup>

Moving towards Turkey's increased activism of the early 2010s, some scholars began investigating whether such a policy change was complementary to the Turkish goal of inclusion in the EU.<sup>315</sup> Against this optimistic view, the turnarounds of the last decade in Turkey-EU relations have impacted this strain of research as it started to search for alternative models of differentiated integration and new patterns of cooperation in the context of divergent geopolitical objectives.<sup>316</sup> Even more recently, questions have diverted to the changing nature of this relationship that began to be framed as a de-Europeanization<sup>317</sup> process that regressed to functionalism and transactionalism<sup>318</sup> in which the Turkish government makes an “oppositional usage of Europeanization” to advance its agenda and to sustain its national identity discourses.<sup>319</sup>

A second aspect closely related to Turkey's (de-)Europeanization process is the changing nature of civil-military relations. Indeed, against a long tradition of a “tutelary” role of the military in Turkish politics, many scholars highlighted a paradigmatic shift from a system in which society maintains a direct, special bond with its military – keeping politics and politicians in a secondary position – to a more democratic one, in which society places its trust in politics, thus forcing the military into the secondary position.<sup>320</sup> One of the most prominent scholars in the field, in 2011, highlighted how “the military's taking democracy as an end, its adoption of Atatürkism as critical

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<sup>314</sup> For Öniş, there has been a notable transformation among Islamist factions, particularly exemplified by the AKP, a conservative party of Islamist origin, which has assumed a central role in driving Turkey's European integration. Moreover, civil society organizations, particularly business associations, have emerged as more active participants in the pro-EU and pro-reform coalition compared to the primary political parties. See Öniş, Z. (2007). Conservative globalists versus defensive nationalists: Political parties and paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 9(3), 247–261.

<sup>315</sup> Tepe, S. (2005). Turkey's AKP: A Model “Muslim-Democratic” Party? *Journal of Democracy*, 16(3), 69–82.; Günes-Ayata, A. (2003). From Euro-scepticism to Turkey-scepticism: Changing political attitudes on the European Union in Turkey. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 5(2), 205–222; Tocci, N. (2005). Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or Anchor for Reform? *South European Society and Politics*, 10(1), 73–83.

<sup>316</sup> Müftüler-Baç, M. (2017). Turkey's future with the European Union: an alternative model of differentiated integration. *Turkish Studies*, 18(3), 416–438; Müftüler-Baç, M. (2017). Assessing Turkey's Foreign Policy Choices towards the European Union. *Insight Turkey*, 19(1), 117–134.

<sup>317</sup> Kaliber, A., & Kaliber, E. (2019). From de-Europeanisation to anti-Western populism: Turkish foreign policy in flux. *The International Spectator*, 54(4), 1–16.

<sup>318</sup> Saatçioğlu, 2020; Bashirov, G., & Yilmaz, I. (2020). The rise of transactionalism in international relations: Evidence from Turkey's relations with the European Union. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 74(2), 165–184.

<sup>319</sup> Yanasmayan, Z. (2017). Oppositional usages of Europeanization in Turkish constitution-making: Discussions on religious freedom. *Turkish Studies*, 18(4), 644–664; Coban Oran, 2022.

<sup>320</sup> Aydın, E. (2009). A Paradigmatic Shift for the Turkish Generals and an End to the Coup Era in Turkey. *The Middle East Journal*, 63(4), 581–596.

thinking, its recent stance of being open to change brought the civil-military relation in Turkey close to those relations in liberal democracies.”<sup>321</sup> However, especially after the 2016 failed coup and further democratic backsliding, the changing balance of power between civilians and the armed forces began to be seen as another manifestation of the deteriorating institutional capacity under autocracy, in which all the decision-making process is centralized.<sup>322</sup> Nonetheless, this did not parallel with the diminishing importance of military aspects for Turkey, but actually with a skyrocketing growth of armed capabilities<sup>323</sup>. Thus, the latest scholarly has tried to demonstrate how the rise of Turkey’s indigenous defense industry is not only functional in the promotion of “drone diplomacy” to insert itself in conflict scenarios and to relaunch Turkey as a rising power in areas of strategic interest but also to boost a psychological effect<sup>324</sup> within the military and population for regime survival purposes.<sup>325</sup>

Similarly, tied to the same inside-out mechanisms, scholarly is more than measureless in addressing one of the most sensitive topics for TFP, namely the Kurdish question. Without the necessity and space to deepen now here, it is still crucial to highlight that, similarly to other aspects of Turkey’s external behavior, patterns of continuity and change also occurred in evaluating its approach to this issue.<sup>326</sup> Indeed, while until the early 2010s, many studies framed the discussion within historical cleavages, sociopolitical identity, and the Europeanization process in the context of the AKP’s “Kurdish opening”<sup>327</sup>, the latest research has highlighted a re-securitization process<sup>328</sup>, in which the Kurdish question has translated from dynamics of domestic ethnopolitics to the ones of regional security and geopolitics.<sup>329</sup>

Finally, helpful for this research is to mention that some authors have tried to position themselves out of the debates on IR grand theories – and their variants – by lowering the analysis to the leadership level. This allows them to address the role of leaders and other constituencies in Turkey’s foreign policy-making. Scholars have extensively analyzed the leadership of Recep Tayyip

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<sup>321</sup> Heper, M. (2011). Civil-Military Relations in Turkey: Toward a Liberal Model? *Turkish Studies*, 12(2), 241–252.

<sup>322</sup> Adar, S., & Yaşar, N. T. (2023). Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in Turkey. How Has the Security Landscape Changed under AKP Rule? *SWP*, 1.

<sup>323</sup> Yeşiltaş, M. (2020). Deciphering Turkey’s Assertive Military and Defense Strategy. *Insight Turkey*, 22(3), 89–114; Hwang, W.-J., & Song, S.-H. (2022). The extension of Turkish influence and the use of drones. *Comparative Strategy*, 41(5), 439–458; Rossiter, A., & Cannon, B. J. (2022). Turkey’s rise as a drone power: Trial by fire. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 38(2), 210–229.

<sup>324</sup> Taskinsoy, John. 2021. “Turkey’s Melancholy Economic Indicators Camouflaged by Militarization as a Foreign Policy.”

<sup>325</sup> Soyaltin-Colella, D., & Demiryol, T. (2023). Unusual middle power activism and regime survival: Turkey’s drone warfare and its regime-boosting effects. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(4), 724–743; Mehmetcik, H., & Çelik, A. C. (2022). The Militarization of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 24(1), 24–41.

<sup>326</sup> One of the most comprehensive works is Gurses, M. (2018). *Anatomy of a civil war: Sociopolitical impacts of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey*. University of Michigan Press.

<sup>327</sup> Savran, A. (2020). The Peace Process between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, 2009–2015. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 22(6), 777–792.

<sup>328</sup> Kösebalaban, 2020. Abrami et al. 2025.

<sup>329</sup> Yegen, M. (2023). Ethnopolitics to geopolitics: The Turkish State and the Kurdish question since 2015. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 50(4), 943–961.

Erdoğan, sometimes compared to other Turkish leaders, and addressed its implications for Turkey's international relations, exploring its impact on diplomatic choices and interactions with domestic and global audiences.<sup>330</sup> Ülgül highlights the significance of personal diplomacy in crisis periods and its increasing prominence in Turkey's diplomatic engagements with foreign countries.<sup>331</sup> Moreover, scholars have investigated the emergence of populism within the AKP regime and its effects on Turkey's foreign policy orientation.<sup>332</sup> Domestic political dynamics and policy styles also significantly shape Turkey's governance and foreign relations approach. Ertugal further emphasized the impact of electoral moments and different moments of crises on Turkey's policy processes, demonstrating how policy styles evolve in response to changes in the political regime and the rise (or diminishing role) of external threats.<sup>333</sup> A psychoanalytic approach has also been adopted to study Turkey's foreign policy behavior, particularly during periods of crisis and uncertainty<sup>334</sup>.

Scholars use relatively new approaches to examine the role of domestic political influences on foreign policy by challenging the statist mainstream theories of IR and focusing on individual and societal levels of analysis. For example, Feminist IR theory, which criticizes gender roles inherent in major IR theories<sup>335</sup>, analyzes the structural and hierarchical principles that exist within different international political systems, examines patriarchy as a historically ingrained part of state identities and, therefore, foreign policy behavior, and applies a gender perspective to the study of war, peace, security, trade, and foreign policy. Ali Bilgiç's 2015 and 2016 works are considered the first genuine attempt to examine Turkish politics through a gendered lens.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Çuhadar et al. (2021) and Kesgin (2020) conducted in-depth analyses of Erdoğan's leadership traits, highlighting their influence on Turkish foreign policy decision-making. Additionally, Görener and Ucal (2011) employed leadership trait analysis to evaluate Erdoğan's worldview and its effect on policy processes during his tenure. Similarly, Ülgül (2024) assesses how Turkish leaders are constrained by structural factors. Çuhadar, Ç. E., Kaarbo, J., Kesgin, B., & Özkeçeci-Taner, B. (2021). Turkish leaders and their foreign policy decision-making style: A comparative and multi-method perspective. *Turkish Studies*, 22(1), 1–27; Kesgin, B. (2020). Turkey's Erdoğan: Leadership style and foreign policy audiences. *Turkish Studies*, 21(1), 56–82; Görener, A. Ş., & Ucal, M. Ş. (2011). The Personality and Leadership Style of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy. *Turkish Studies*, 12(3), 357–381; Ülgül, M. (2024). Do leaders really matter? The failure of ambitions in Turkish foreign policy. *International Relations*, 1–25.

<sup>331</sup> Ülgül, M. (2017). Continuity or Change in Turkish Foreign Policy? Analyzing the Policy Fluctuations during the Justice and Development Party Era. 7(1); Ülgül, M. (2019). Erdoğan's Personal Diplomacy and Turkish Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 21(4).

<sup>332</sup> Özbek and Yaşar (2018) and Arısan (2022) explored the intersection of populism and foreign policy, particularly noting the shift towards a more assertive and revisionist stance under AKP rule. Arısan (2022) delved into the dynamics of conservative populism, emphasizing its influence on Turkish-Islamist ideology and foreign policy decision-making.

<sup>333</sup> Ertugal, E. (2022). Does policy style shift when the political regime changes? Insights from Turkey. *Contemporary Politics*, 28(2), 144–166.

<sup>334</sup> Adisonmez, U. C., & Oztig, L. I. (2024). A Psychoanalytic Approach to Turkish Foreign Policy: Crisis, Disorder, and Disorientation. *Critical Studies on Security*, 1–22.

<sup>335</sup> See, among others, one of the latest interesting works on the topic, Aggestam, K., Rosamond, A. B., & Hedling, E. (2024). *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy*. Springer Nature Switzerland.

<sup>336</sup> Bilgiç, A. (2015). 'We are not barbarians': Gender politics and Turkey's quest for the West. *International Relations (London)*, 29(2), 198–218; Bilgiç, A. (2016). *Turkey, power and the West: Gendered international relations and foreign policy*. I.B. Tauris. In his work, Bilgiç argues that Turkey's relations with the West have been framed in terms of meeting the Western "standards," which in the long term have caused Turkey to suffer from "subordinated masculinity." Following this argument, Ataç's research uses the conceptual framework of "hypermasculine hegemonic masculinity" to analyze Turkey's S-400 crisis involving NATO, the US, and Russia. A different line of research connecting feminism and Turkey's foreign policy focuses on an institutional framework for Turkey by outlining the role of women in diplomacy and foreign policy through NATO's "Women, Peace, and Security Agenda." Akça Ataç, C. (2021). A Feminist Reading of Turkish Foreign Policy and the S-400 Crisis. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 46(4), 103–119.

One last point to remark is that, while this literature review has not surveyed any of them in detail, all of the aforementioned disciplinary approaches, theoretical debates, and singular aspects regarding the study of TFP are not limited to a macro dimension that analyzes the phenomenon as a whole. Instead, these peculiarities are extensively employed in analyzing more detailed issues like Turkey's bilateral relations and engagement with different regions and areas of interest. Above all, the relationship between TFP and the MENA region occupies a high place and is particularly significant in appreciating the changes along different historical conjectures. It is thus notable that the shift from the cautious approach of the twentieth century, through the promotion of "Turkey as a model for the region bridge," has continued until the more recent return to a securitized and hard power-based approach.<sup>337</sup> In this context, analyses and studies have also deepened down into sub-areas – like the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>338</sup>, the Gulf<sup>339</sup>, and Kurdish majority areas<sup>340</sup> as well as on the relations that Turkey entertains with other regional state and non-state actors.<sup>341</sup> A growing body of literature of the last years is also devoted to making sense of the expansion of Turkey's presence in Africa, where the question mainly revolves around whether there is a real "Ankara consensus" based on diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, and military means) that differs from a neo-colonialist perspective.<sup>342</sup> The same themes and inquiries are now more pronounced concerning Turkey's behavior towards Central Asia<sup>343</sup> and the Balkans.<sup>344</sup> Here, it is notable how the literature has enriched the more traditional focus on historical legacies and immaterial elements with queries on whether Turkey has succeeded in translating them into an effective policy. Finally, academic interest is also increasing regarding Turkey's ambiguous mode of engagement with other global players (like

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<sup>337</sup> Just as a recent example, see Altunışık, M. B., & Martin, L. G. (2023). Turkey and the Middle East and North Africa under the AKP: A Three Level Analysis of Foreign Policy Change. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 20(78), 79–96.

<sup>338</sup> Tziarras, 2022.

<sup>339</sup> Başkan, B., & Pala, Ö. (2020). Making sense of Turkey's reaction to the Qatar Crisis. *The International Spectator*, 55(2), 65-78.

<sup>340</sup> Abrami et al. 2025.

<sup>341</sup> Oktav, Ö. Z., Parlar Dal, E., & Kurşun, A. M. (Eds.). (2018). *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War*. Springer International Publishing.

<sup>342</sup> Donelli, F. (2021). *Turkey in Africa: Turkey's strategic involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa*. I.B. Tauris; Heibach, J., & Taş, H. (2024). Beyond the Soft–Hard Power Binary: Resource Control in Turkey's Foreign Policy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 26(3), 311–326.

<sup>343</sup> Altunışık, M. B. (2024). Turkey's 'Return' to Central Asia in a Shifting Global and Regional Context: New Opportunities and Limitations. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 1–16; Alaranta, Toni, and Kristiina Silvan. 2022. *Turkey in Central Asia: Possibilities and Limits of a Greater Role*. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

<sup>344</sup> Bechev, D. (2022b). A rival or an awkward partner? Turkey's relationship with the West in the Balkans. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 22(1), 11–24; Mulalić, M., & Karic, M. (2023). Framing Türkiye's Cosmopolitan Relations with the Western Balkans. *Insight Turkey*, 25(Spring 2023), 103–120; Alpan, B., & Öztürk, A. E. (2022). Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans amidst 'soft power' and 'de-Europeanisation.' *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 22(1), 45–63.

China<sup>345</sup> and Russia<sup>346</sup>) and how its new conceptualization of “flexible alliances” impacts its relations with the US, EU, and NATO.<sup>347</sup>

In a nutshell, all these viewpoints can be distilled as follows. If we prioritize neorealist and structural perspectives, domestic politics and the party’s ideologies in government become less significant, suggesting that the observed trends in contemporary TFP would likely persist under any government. However, policymakers could still influence regional power dynamics, potentially leading to shifts in Turkish foreign policy. On the other hand, if ideational factors are deemed more influential, then changes in TFP are rooted in domestic political dynamics, including the emergence of different political actors, identities, and ideologies. In this scenario, policymakers would focus on understanding the underlying foreign policy approaches or orientations that motivate much of TFP, recognizing that the apparent shift in TFP is not “simply situational or a result of cost-benefit calculations but more the result of an identity shift that may have larger implications, particularly concerning Turkey’s future place in Western institutions.”<sup>348</sup> This perspective also overlooks the persistent realist elements in Turkish foreign policy under the AKP governments, which have contributed to broader security concerns shaping Turkey’s international relations beyond specific political elites.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Yilmaz, G., & Eliküçük Yıldırım, N. (2020). Authoritarian diffusion or cooperation? Turkey’s emerging engagement with China. *Democratization*, 27(7), 1202–1220.

<sup>346</sup> Kubicek, P. (2022). Structural dynamics, pragmatism, and shared grievances: Explaining Russian-Turkish relations. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 784–801; Cheterian, V. (2023). Friend and Foe: Russia–Turkey relations before and after the war in Ukraine. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 34(7), 1271–1294.

<sup>347</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Soler İ Lecha, E. (2023). Hope and Despair: Understanding Change in Turkey-EU Relations. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 20(78), 21–42; Mufti, 2023.

<sup>348</sup> Kubicek, 2022, 647.

<sup>349</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 2021.

## 1.5. The Need for a Third Way

In general, the state of the art presented above demonstrates how the constant contributions to the debate itself, and especially the way different analytical perspectives approach it, are both indications of (1) insufficient synthesis among disciplines; (2) excessive reliance on labels produced by pure normative, liberal or constructivist approaches; (3) deficiency in addressing TFP as a whole and in elaborating approaches in line with its rapid but contradictory evolutionary pace; (4) poorness in testing TFP behavior and its external relations in contexts where line of change a continuity might be more blurred.

Therefore, it is evident that there is no coherent theoretical framework that moves beyond idiosyncratic historical narratives of relations with specific regions/countries and takes into account both domestic and environmental changes. Domestic changes do matter in the decision-making process due to perceptions. However, as a middle power, Turkey's actions are constrained by great powers and its external environment. Second, the literature raises another dilemma: on the one hand, it claims that TFP is too sensitive to government changes; on the other hand, it is presumed to be highly institutionalized in Kemalism, which remained unchanged for almost 80 years. Thus, the literature fails to explain the continuity of foreign policy under different governments and policy changes during the same government rule. Accordingly, relying solely on domestic and governmental changes creates a lack of attention to institutionalizing foreign policy and environmental effects. Therefore, another set of factors that bridge the environmental impact and domestic mechanisms needs to be included in the analysis of foreign policy behavior.

In this regard, a new strain of research has lately arisen to explain the anomalies of the TFP since 2002. Thus, it is worth briefly surveying some novelties that have recently emerged in the literature but do not intend to discard them. Instead, for the present study, combining their different approaches and ways of looking at TFP is a tool to create a broader analysis framework. This increases the explanatory power and settles a new ground for a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon.

As Oğuzlu underlines, the ongoing transition towards a multipolar world order has coincided with more drastic changes within Turkey's domestic context.<sup>350</sup> Therefore, TFP seems to have undertaken a more erratic direction, making it more difficult to distinguish the global-local nexus affecting domestic and foreign policy dynamics.<sup>351</sup> This automatically evidences the limitations of

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<sup>350</sup> Oğuzlu, 2023.

<sup>351</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021.



neorealism and its variants. One is that the international environment does not present unambiguous challenges or opportunities. States and leaders often confront a set of possible responses to a given situation. In other words, the international structure provides context (constraints and/or opportunities) and may act as a necessary but insufficient element to explain states' behavior. In the case of Turkey, for example, one could imagine that in today's multipolar environment, the country could theoretically seek greater power and influence by pursuing a range of competing policies in its immediate neighborhood, "including those promoting democracy and good governance, cultivating economic relations with its less developed neighbors, bandwagoning with the leading powers to advance its own or multilateral goals, balancing against those same powers to reshape regional dynamics, or even adopting a more unilateral course."<sup>352</sup> It could also rely more (or less) on hard or soft power. Indeed, Turkey arguably has pursued all of the above at various times and with varying degrees of commitment in the past decade.<sup>353</sup> On the question of how to better address the twists and turns of TFP, ideational and institutionalist approaches have contributed to stress the importance of lower-level factors (e.g., regime type, domestic political considerations, leadership) that may shape foreign policy.

As it will be further explained in the next section, Neoclassical Realism (NCR) offers an amendment of sorts to neo-realism that attempts to blend structural factors with intervening variables such as domestic political imperatives, ideologies, perceptions, or even leader-specific features, which can be employed to remedy some of these cavities. Its "third way and middle ground approach" accounts for state behavior in a way that a more parsimonious systems-level theory cannot achieve.<sup>354</sup> However, whether systemic and domestic variables can be genuinely disentangled in a hierarchy and whether this more comprehensive approach can yield well-defined, functional hypotheses (as opposed to ad hoc explanations) is something not clear and that, consequently, leaves room for new de-hierarchized approaches.<sup>355</sup>

In paving the way for a third way were the pioneering works of Mustafa Aydın. Since his first works<sup>356</sup>, he refused to adopt any specific theoretical framework in favor of a reliance on a combination of different factors. This allowed him to increasingly include ideas, state identity, socialization, and historical learning processes in discussing the determinants of Turkey's grand strategy. For example, Aydın contends that "a broader perspective could provide the outlines of a

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<sup>352</sup> Kubicek, 2022, 650.

<sup>353</sup> Idem.

<sup>354</sup> Foulon, M., & Meibauer, G. (2020). Realist avenues to global International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(4), 1203–1229.

<sup>355</sup> Şahin, 2020.

<sup>356</sup> Aydın, M. (1999). Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Historical Framework and Traditional Inputs. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(4), 152–186.

general framework (i.e., grand strategy as a pattern of behavior), conditioned by its geography and history, the ideational desires of its ruling elites and the limitations of the international system.”<sup>357</sup> He suggests that while the question of where Turkey belongs will continue to be debated and that with alternative anchorages on the West, Eurasia, and the Middle East, Turkey’s grand strategy will likely be based on the country’s hard-learned experiences and a tradition that has created a set of relatively inflexible principles.<sup>358</sup> In a similar vein, Öniş and Kutlay have shown how “the Turkish case is instrumental in terms of highlighting the interaction between international power shifts and the illiberal turn in the domestic realm, to understand the new wave of heterodox crises in the post-Global Financial Crisis era.”<sup>359</sup> In brief, they argue that the paradigmatic shifts in foreign policy and the drivers of Turkey’s quest for autonomous policy space can be understood as an outcome of interrelated transformations at global, regional, and domestic levels.<sup>360</sup>

One work that represents a watershed point in the analysis of foreign policy in the MENA region is undoubtedly the edited volume by Hinnebusch and Ehteshami<sup>361</sup>. As will be unpacked later in the theoretical section of this research, their work’s originality stems from the elaboration version of complex realism, which allows for a de-hierarchized approach to the determinant of foreign policy making, a deeper consideration of historical and long-period processes, and the inclusion of immaterial factors. In sum, it builds on a theoretical framework that not only splits the external level into the international, regional, and intra-state dimensions but also unpacks “the black box of policy making”<sup>362</sup> by considering an intrastate level in which domestic debates for a country’s foreign policy role, power concentration decision-making process, and idiosyncratic variables are given equal importance. Although Robins uses these analytical tools to survey TFP along historical lines in the volume, it appears outdated and, therefore, unable to capture the most recent changes in TFP.<sup>363</sup> Nonetheless, the volume maintains the merits of having paved the way for a full-fledged approach to studying foreign policy.

A specific strain of research that scholars of TFP have lately and abundantly employed is NCR. Among them, Şahin’s critical approach provides a well-structured overview of the ebbs and flows of the different ways TFP has been studied and theorized.<sup>364</sup> He is convincing in his suggestion

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<sup>357</sup> Aydın 2020, 219.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Öniş & Kutlay, 2021, 2.

<sup>360</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, 1086.

<sup>361</sup> Hinnebusch, R. A., & Ehteshami, A. (Eds.). (2014). *The foreign policies of Middle East states* (Second edition). Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>363</sup> Robins, 2014.

<sup>364</sup> Şahin, 2020.

to add internal factors as intervening variables to show how foreign policy behavior results from the way decision-makers filter the pressures from the system. More important, for the sake of this project, is the fact that he is original in drifting the attention towards the concept of “change” and in the way he considers Turkey’s quest for autonomy not to be regarded as an axis shift but an “anomaly from the traditional TFP.”<sup>365</sup> However, the scope of his articles is mainly concentrated on stimulating the emergence of a more flexible and interdisciplinary framework of understanding rather than providing an overreaching analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy. Therefore, this leaves room to provide more depth of examination, consider changes along a broader timeframe, and lower the level of investigation at the leadership level.

Some of the latest studies have used this theoretical framework more explicitly. In his monograph, Yılmaz<sup>366</sup> has argued that Turkey follows a robust neoclassical realist foreign policy approach in its external affairs that is observable, especially in Turkey’s bilateral relations with its core allies – the US, Russia, and the EU. Similarly, Tziarras uses NCR to demonstrate that what he calls the “Lausanne Syndrome” in Turkey’s strategic thinking under the AKP regime predicts a revisionist type of foreign policy behavior and tests his hypotheses in four case studies: Cyprus, Libya, Syria, and Iraq<sup>367</sup>. In his book, Sönmez adopts NCR and incorporates international and domestic factors in his analysis of Turkey’s foreign policy since 2002.<sup>368</sup> According to him, the fluctuations in Turkey’s relative power position in response to the changes at the international level stand out as the most critical factor in explaining Turkey’s changing foreign policy approach. In other words, it is the interplay between the changes at both international and domestic levels that provides the most comprehensive understanding of why and how Turkey pursued an activist and assertive foreign policy in the post-Cold War era and “why the country experienced the zenith of this activism abroad under the AKP rule.”<sup>369</sup>

A promising author who echoes this tradition with “middle ground theories” is Donelli. In his seminal works, the author considers four intervening variables – national role conception, decision-making model, perception of the strategic environment, and orientation towards the regional order – and discusses Turkey’s shift from a wary isolationist attitude to a wary interventionist one.<sup>370</sup> Özşahin, Donelli, and Gasco<sup>371</sup> have also applied this framework to Turkey-China relations. Finally,

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 485.

<sup>366</sup> Yılmaz, 2021.

<sup>367</sup> Tziarras, 2022.

<sup>368</sup> Sönmez, 2020.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>370</sup> Donelli, F. (2020). Explaining the Role of Intervening Variables in Turkey’s Foreign Policy Behaviour. *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, 6(2), 223–257.

<sup>371</sup> Özşahin, M. C., Donelli, F., & Gasco, R. (2022). China–Turkey Relations from the Perspective of Neoclassical Realism. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 9(2), 218–239.

while this innovative framework is mainly limited to case-to-case analysis in academic papers, Donelli is among the few who elaborated on a more comprehensive book.<sup>372</sup> Yet, it is limited to the case of Turkey's involvement in Africa. Geographically oriented is also Akcadag-Alagoz's work, which explains Turkish foreign policy's orientation toward East Asia. Using an NCR perspective – along with international and regional systemic factors such as the global shift of power from West to East, relocation of the center of the international economy, the pivot to Asia trend, and changing regional dynamics in the Middle East – the author adds new domestic determinants, namely the AKP's pragmatic foreign policy and the role of the Turkish business community.<sup>373</sup> Similarly, Kardaş looks at “conjunctural changes” in TFP.<sup>374</sup> The author traces how the fragmentation of the regional order, combined with the rise of a new security culture and power blocs domestically, undergirded the reversal in Ankara's Middle East policy to a process of revisionism and securitization. However, being focused on recent developments in the MENA region, it fails to trace the lines of continuity and change of these processes from and throughout the pre-Cold War period, as well as concerning other geographical scenarios.

Özyilmaz-Kiraz elaborates on an innovative framework to assess TFP changes throughout different historical phases: “system, state and individual level of analysis are used in proportion to the intensity of their effects on the emergence and implementation of multidirectional foreign policy.”<sup>375</sup> Though valid and well-funded, this approach refers only to the West as a comparative term. It does not include other orientations present and influential in Turkey's policymakers' circles. Moreover, while it convincingly explains Turkey's increasing activism in the international arena, it lacks a link between decision-making mechanisms, institutional changes, and leaders' perceptions. Built on a similar approach is the Special issue edited by Christofis, which shows how – and in which complex ways – TFP has changed over the years. It also discusses the nature of the changes through three distinct themes: priorities, challenges, and contradictions.<sup>376</sup> Its relevance stems from the stress of how it has become clear that the foreign policy vision of the AKP is multi-faceted, even in its most radical manifestations. However, despite a comparative perspective, the articles of its special issue are more case-study-oriented and thus lack a historical background that can provide more insights into TFP's long-term trajectory.

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<sup>372</sup> Donelli, 2021.

<sup>373</sup> Alagoz, E. A. (2021). Turkey's own “pivot to Asia”: A neoclassical realist analysis. *Asia Europe Journal*, 19(3), 291–307.

<sup>374</sup> Kardaş, Ş. (2021). Revisionism and Resecuritization of Turkey's Middle East Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23(3), 490–501.

<sup>375</sup> Özyilmaz Kiraz, B. (2023). Multidirectionality(ies) in the Turkish Foreign Policy: Compensatory, Complementary and Reactive Multidirectionality. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(3), 558–581.

<sup>376</sup> Christofis, N. (2019). The Foreign Policy of the “New Turkey”: Priorities, Challenges and Contradictions. *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 9(1).

To highlight the importance of historicizing the analysis comes the work of Yalvaç. Its stress on the necessity of acknowledging the structural context of foreign policy-making is interesting, as it complements the agent-centric, micro-level analyses that dominate the mainstream TFP analysis.<sup>377</sup> The argument advanced in this article is that foreign policies pursued by different states can only be adequately explained if we open “the black box of the state in TFP by emphasizing the importance of both the domestic and the international structural context of foreign policy-making.”<sup>378</sup> This is essential as the conflict between social forces in specific historical contexts is the source of social change, which affects state policy. However, the fact that he firmly relies on a historical materialist approach results in an analysis constructed on a rigid, mono-causal, and unidirectional framework that restricts the boundaries for an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>379</sup>

An author who tries to open this “black box of the state concerning foreign policy outcomes” is Özdamar.<sup>380</sup> With solid reference to role theory, he helps us understand the link between the agent, the structure, and the agent’s subjective perceptions of the agent-structure relationship. Accordingly, by focusing on roles of decision-making and the elite’s subjective perceptions as to Turkey’s material and ideological power vis-à-vis others in the region and other great powers, such as the United States, Russia, and the EU, he states that one can clarify Turkey’s ambitious foreign policy and its seemingly “irrational” decisions. First, the role theoretical approach does not entirely subscribe to the neorealist assumption that structure shapes actors’ behavior. Instead, a more “realistic” picture of the agent-structure relationship presents a different image with two-way interactions. Also, actors are not perfectly rational, and their own interpretation of the structure directly influences their behaviors. In this regard, role theory provides valuable tools for researchers to connect internal-external linkages and changes in how the alters view the ego as policy preferences change.<sup>381</sup>

On a similar pattern, Ege adopts a clear post-structuralist stance, providing a critical approach that contends that foreign policy is not just an external discourse but is also effective in the struggle for power, identity, and difference at the domestic level. What is innovative is the final finding that traces a coherent pattern of both continuities and discontinuities between the so-called Kemalist tradition and the AKP period, in which the author finds the conception of “national interest” and the power structures of the Turkish state to play a fundamental role in connecting domestic and foreign

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<sup>377</sup> Yalvaç, F. (2014). Approaches to Turkish Foreign Policy: A Critical Realist Analysis. *Turkish Studies*, 15(1), 117–138.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>379</sup> Yalvaç, F. (2022). A Historical Materialist Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 13(52), 3–22.

<sup>380</sup> Özdamar, Ö. (2016). Domestic Sources of Changing Turkish Foreign Policy. In C. Cantir & J. Kaarbo (Eds.), *Domestic role contestation, foreign policy, and international relations* (pp. 89–104). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 103.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

politics.<sup>382</sup> Kara's article is complementary in highlighting these interrelated dynamics and analyzing the role of domestic imperatives in Turkish foreign policymaking.<sup>383</sup> Her work shows how state leaders adopt insulation, accommodation, or mobilization political strategies to retain power or build coalitions. The claim is that, since 2002, each AKP administration has carried out different domestic political strategies that affected the country's foreign policy behavior. Thus, her article does not reject the influence of individual decision-making or the systemic structure on Turkish foreign policymaking, and it acknowledges that domestic politics are not the only variable that affects Turkish foreign policymaking. However, it argues that the AKP policymaking elites' choice of domestic political strategies to deal with domestic opposition while diverting public attention from divisive domestic problems to Turkish military activities abroad has played an essential role in determining Turkey's foreign policy behavior over the past two decades.<sup>384</sup> Building on similar assumptions, McLean explores the divergence between public discourse and Turkish foreign policy practice in the context of Turkey's regional pressures.<sup>385</sup> It argues that divergence occurs because elites rearrange the hierarchy of domestic ideas that connect with foreign policy. However, it does not provide a sufficient context of the Turkish sociopolitical realm to demonstrate how Turkey can "respond to regional threats appropriately, without undue interference from domestic political forces."<sup>386</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning some very recent works on TFP that highlight several aspects and theoretical hints on which future research can be built. The edited volume by Erdoğan and Hisarlıoğlu<sup>387</sup> is composed of TFP analyses that cover critical IR theories of structuralist, post-structuralist, feminist, critical constructivist, and post/decolonial approaches of critical constructivism, post-colonialism, or world system theory as well as multi-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary methodology that adopt ethnographic or sociological approaches. The book encompasses historical and contemporary issues, discussions, and processes of ruptures (de)constructing identities. The manuscripts also focus on Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) through promising critical approaches. The book also studies the epistemological boundaries of the traditional IR literature while evaluating "the (re)making of foreign policy about the identities of local, regional, and global lineages."<sup>388</sup> The volume essentially attempts to deconstruct the recognized (or unchallenged) matters in TFP via critical IR theories. The noble side of this piece is that it puts a novel orientation on critical theory

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<sup>382</sup> Ege, 2022.

<sup>383</sup> Kara, M. (2022). Linking Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy: The Justice and Development Party's political strategies and their divergent foreign policy effects. *Turkish Studies*, 23(4), 529–553.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 530.

<sup>385</sup> McLean, W. (2015). Understanding Divergence between Public Discourse and Turkish Foreign Policy Practice: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis. *Turkish Studies*, 16(4), 449–464

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>387</sup> Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., viii.

since the Turkish IR community has, in the majority, tracked their research on empirical matters rather than theory and is usually determined as heavily Turkey-centric.<sup>389</sup> Thus, the book's deconstruction is deciphering the entrenched hierarchies, power hierarchies, and domestic political controversies behind the TFP while touching beyond the established agency-structure debates, investigating how actors decide and execute their decisions, rather than following predetermined practices dictated to them by the conditions and their readymade interests.<sup>390</sup> Finally, one significant contribution to open a new strain of analysis is that the book takes deviation from most IR scholars in the Turkish context regarding "how to treat the state." Indeed, almost all authors set the "state" as the center of their analyses; they do not take it as a pre-given, static, and eternally fixed entity but as a changing – even unstable – social construct.

Another work that opens for integration of a broader historical background in IR/FPA-based approaches is the volume edited by Özkeçeci-Taner and Akgül Açıkmeşe.<sup>391</sup> It brings together an all-women group of scholars to provide a historically grounded and theoretically rich examination of the continuities and changes in Turkey's foreign policy since the Republic's establishment in 1923. Using different theories, it clarifies the interaction between domestic politics and foreign policymaking. The book charts the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy vis-a-vis several regions and global actors and examines the significant developments in Turkey's relations with these actors. Some chapters emphasize the continuities in Turkey's external relations, and others examine the substantial changes and discontinuities in certain areas. More relevant is the proposition "that Turkey's state interests may not always coincide with the interests of the ruling elite."<sup>392</sup> Thus, Turkey is a *sui generis* country that has not followed a specific, predictable trajectory in the past 100 years of foreign policy. Likewise, it is not easy to grasp the fluctuations in Turkish foreign policy from the lenses of one theoretical perspective. Accordingly, its variety in terms of theoretical accounts helps understand Turkey's foreign policy toward different external actors in the world".<sup>393</sup> For instance, in somehow summing up her findings of a fruitful academic production, Müftüler-Baç recognized how "the withering away of the EU's political anchor over Turkey, the demise of the liberal democratic order, and the emergence of alternatives to EU accession in the form of differentiated integration resulted

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>390</sup> Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022, 2.

<sup>391</sup> Özkeçeci-Taner, B., & Akgül Açıkmeşe, S. (2023). Historical and Theoretical Aspects of Turkey's Foreign Policy. In B. Özkeçeci-Taner & S. Akgül Açıkmeşe (Eds.), *One Hundred Years of Turkish Foreign Policy (1923-2023)* (pp. 1–23). Springer International Publishing.

<sup>392</sup> Özkeçeci-Taner, B., & Akgül Açıkmeşe, S. (2023). Historical and Theoretical Aspects of Turkey's Foreign Policy. In B. Özkeçeci-Taner & S. Akgül Açıkmeşe (Eds.), *One Hundred Years of Turkish Foreign Policy (1923-2023)* (pp. 1–23). Springer International Publishing, 248

<sup>393</sup> Özkeçeci-Taner, & Akgül Açıkmeşe, 9.

in a reformulation of Turkey's foreign policy toward the EU."<sup>394</sup> Similarly, some chapters consider Turkey's relations with Russia, China, NATO, or the MENA region to make sense of the pendulum between pragmatism and ideology as the main drivers of policy making. Finally, other sections explore new lenses to look at TFP, ranging from feminist theories to humanitarian diplomacy. Nonetheless, the book aims to provide a basis on which to build – considering the complexity of the phenomenon itself and the richness of specific sub-areas of analysis – rather than to represent a “final dot” on the analysis of TFP.

Last, a recent article by Altunışık introduces the original concept of Turkey as a “modified middle power.”<sup>395</sup> While it is exhaustive in exploring the general characteristics of Turkey's foreign policy role conception in long durée, it does not aim to reach any explanatory power in assessing empirical changes. However, in her co-authored work with Martin<sup>396</sup>, she contributes to TFP literature by demonstrating that the continuity in power of a more centralized government does not guarantee continuity in foreign policy as conceptualized in the literature on foreign policy change. What matters the most for this research is their full-fledged proposition that aims to de-hierarchize the factors and the levels of analysis. Indeed, the author analyzes Turkey's foreign policy changes by applying “three intersecting levels of analysis”: transformations in the regional and global international system, shifts in domestic politics, and changes in individual leadership. Moreover, what is helpful for a multilevel analysis based on a broader historical background is the recognition that these three different levels interact through a two-way directionality.

Overall, the relevance of assessing this new room of disciplinary dialogue is well evidenced by the “endorsement” made by Hakan Yavuz. Despite belonging to the camp of history and Area Studies, he has recently affirmed that “to fully understand the factors driving Turkey's foreign and security policies, one must examine the domestic and international changes. Thus, Neoclassical Realism is the most helpful approach to deciphering TFP's macro- and micro-dynamics. This requires scholars and policymakers to explore inside-out and outside-in perspectives to develop a comprehensive picture of Turkey's foreign policy. Accordingly, this compels understanding the role of individual and group identities and their respective ideologies in making foreign policy, along with the dynamic interaction between the state and society.

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<sup>394</sup> Müftüler-Baç, M. (2021). External Differentiated Integration: The Modalities of Turkey's Opting into the European Union. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 55, 73.

<sup>395</sup> Altunışık, 2023

<sup>396</sup> Altunışık & Martin, 2023.



Considering this extensive critical literature review, the following section elaborates on this project's research questions and the theoretical and methodological framework for addressing its original inquiries on TFP.

## 2. THEORIES AND METHODS

### 2.1. Research questions

Overall, looking at the literature review, it appears that, despite increasing abundance, “the process of foreign policy-making is one of the least well-studied aspects of Turkish Foreign Policy, and suggestions can often only be speculative or illustrated by occasional examples.”<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the fact that the dominant view in the literature is tempted to explain TFP in accordance with government changes raises two main dilemmas. First, it favors a perception that Turkey’s foreign policy-making is not affected by several regional or international pressures, reducing Turkish decision-makers’ motivations to be shaped either by their ideologies or “sense of power.”<sup>2</sup> Second, it fails to explain continuations and changes in TFP after 2002, with arguments such as the “axis shift” in the course of the same government. Therefore, this project agrees with the necessity to find a balance between two main usual assumptions about TFP. If it is true that elite ideas in Turkey are not easy to change because they are highly institutionalized in the state tradition, at the same time, it might be seemingly easy to claim that TFP is typically dependent on government and leaders’ identities. Yet, in that case, it is hard to conclude that there is a clear-cut continuity, either within the pre-AKP era or in the course of the various AKP governments. It follows that TFP is shaped neither simply by government changes nor easily wielded on environmental transformations. In other words, this means that external systemic/structural alterations and domestic or leadership changes alone cannot explain paradigmatic shifts in TFP. In parallel, as seen in the literature review, labeling Turkey’s sociopolitical actors involved in the formulation of different policies at different levels with just one interpretative category like liberalism, Islamism, nationalism, or Kemalism undermines what both Area Studies and the recent turn in “global IR” have underlined: that is, the risk of missing the nuances characterizing a specific milieu in which the state is not a monolithic entity, but rather a sum of historical processes of formation, role conception, and learning experiences involving leaders and its populace.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hale, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Demirtas-Bagdonas.

<sup>3</sup> Zarakol has extensively worked on this issue. Among all, see Zarakol, A. (2022). *Before the West: The rise and fall of eastern world orders*. Cambridge University Press; See also Bilgin, P., & Smith, K. (2024). *Thinking Globally About World Politics: Beyond Global IR*. Springer Nature Switzerland; Schlichte, K., & Stetter, S. (Eds.). (2023). *The Historicity of International Politics: Imperialism and the Presence of the Past* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press

Indeed, this thesis is built on the necessity to find additional explanatory factors to bridge the void between these different dimensions in the study of TFP.<sup>4</sup> Concurrently, it seeks to open new paths for the study of this subject with a broader view that considers the fundamental “first steps of change” started in the 1980s. In light of these premises, this project aims to fill the gap in comprehensively assessing the main drivers, bases, and outcomes of TFP. Although it relies on existing empirical data (primary and secondary resources) and resonates through empirical outcomes (historical conjunctures and contingencies), it mainly aims to investigate the process that links the two. This means analyzing TFP making as a cumulative process in which patterns of continuity and change can overlap rather than a simple mechanical and deterministic understanding based on variables selected hierarchically.

First, it surveys the first significant changing phase of TFP in the 1980s until the complicated passages of the late 1990s coalition governments. Then, it examines the period with the AKP in office as a new political force since 2002, with particular reference to how its enduring mandate remains characterized by alternations linking domestic dynamics with Turkey’s multidimensional policies and its erraticism in the international arena. Therefore, the general objective is to adjust something that has already been recognized<sup>5</sup> – but only partially – around one key question: *What are the parameters of change in Turkish Foreign Policy, and how is their reciprocal influence on each other related to Turkey’s complexity in terms of historical state-formation, institutional-public relations, ideational-pragmatic elements, and leader’s images-national role conception?* The central thesis is that change in TFP does not occur exclusively because of (exclusively) internal or external parameters in a specific period but 1) on the basis of a longer historical process where a “two-way interaction” is at play; 2) because of other “middle parameters” that condition decision and policy-making processes. Thus, under the spotlight of these core issues in the existing debate, it is essential to outline some sub-questions that were drawn from the critical literature review.

1. In the context of changing international scenarios that began in the 1980s, is Turkey a proactive or a reactive player? Is its current international role the result of a “longer historical learning process”?
2. Is TFP elaborated more according to its material capabilities or the ideological preferences of its leadership? How do equilibrium transformations at the socio-political and institutional level influence Turkey’s decision-making and foreign policy-making?

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<sup>4</sup> Şahin, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Just to name some, Tziarras, 2014; Aydınli, 2023. Oğuzlu, & Han, 2023; Kubicek, 2022. See also the ones cited in the literature review on NCR and third-way approaches.

3. Who are the main actors involved in this process? Which elements influence their perceptions and reactions? What are the relations between state-institutional formation, traditional strategic culture, historical role perception, and the emergence of new sociopolitical forces and ideas?
4. Is Turkey's decision-making and policy-making process a "one-man show" or still constrained by a plurality of actors, different constraints, and evolving types of interests?

Although the abovementioned questions depict a primal attempt to deconstruct a brand-new historical inquiry, the originality of this project stands on two additional pillars. Firstly, not aprioristically excluding any dimension, it points to overcoming the polarization between rigorous evaluations by building on a multiple-level analysis that allows for a well-balanced heterogeneity by applying its own research design. Secondly, its purpose stems also from the necessity to update structured results to ever-changing exogenous and endogenous dynamics affecting Turkish politics. It does not rely on a unilateral preference for a specific set of ready-to-use variables. Instead, it encompasses their interrelations to obtain less speculative and more far-reaching evidence on multiple yet complementary levels by seeking a more solid reference to a historical perspective. Overall, this project aims to represent an updated version of those few works that go beyond the general tendency to merely identify domestic, systemic, or both kinds of foreign policy drivers.<sup>6</sup> Thus, its additional strength and potential contribution is that it points to describing TFP's drivers and tracking the causal chains in a particular foreign policy behavior while looking at different sociopolitical units along a broader diachronic frame. Consequently, the scope is also to detect better which parameters are most important in TFP and understand how specific chains of mechanisms correlate with different agents, constituencies, and foreign policy behaviors since the 1980s.

What stands behind this approach is the idea that, primarily due to some empirical limitations, the identified relationships between external and internal parameters may only sometimes be so definite as to argue for direct or specific causation. However, the correlations deducted in such instances remain valuable, given that they offer significant insights into each parameter and its relationship with internal and external grounds of the Turkish political field. Adopting such a perspective will help to address some of the shortcomings in the literature on TFP: (1) overlooking the grey area that lies at the domestic-foreign frontier; (2) taking for granted the role of the Turkish state as a monolithic

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<sup>6</sup> Aydın, M. (1994). *Foreign Policy Formation And The Interaction Between Domestic And International Environments: A Study of Change in Turkish Foreign Policy During 1980* [PhD Thesis]. Lancaster University; Sonmez, Goktug (2017) *The interplay between international and domestic factors in Turkey's grand strategy-making: activism, disappointment, and readjustment/*. PhD thesis. SOAS University of London; Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era* [PhD Thesis]. University of Birmingham.

unit without considering the different constituencies of its conformation; (3) missing the historical dimensions that allow grasping how the long-term mechanisms of learning, contesting, and conceiving the role of the country affect decision-making processes and foreign policy outcomes.

To do so, as will be further explained in the methodological section, this project's multilevel analysis relies on two parallel approaches. First, adopting and appreciating the importance of a historical analysis allows for the inclusion of multiple sources. On the one hand, the secondary literature can be "tested" or "confronted" with primary sources coming from recently opened archives or publications from the Turkish state institutions and diplomatic memoirs for the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republic. On the other hand, historical insight does not imply keeping political events and personalities fossilized in the past but tracing a more solid and reliable linkage between the "present and the past."<sup>7</sup>

Concretely, this means seeking to identify foreign policy change not as clear-cut evidence but as a more blurred process of modifications, failures, unclear paths, and learning processes occurring over either a shorter or longer timespan. Second, the adoption of FPA theories and methods helps to set the parameters and the "grounds" within which these processes can be identified. In this sense, while a historical perspective helps situate foreign policy making and outcomes into a specific context, an FPA outlook is functional to complement it with instruments to identify the separation – and at the same time, the connections – between the "political fields" in which various agents (e.g., the state, the parties, public opinion...) operate and interact.<sup>8</sup> In addition, this allows us to set the parameters for methods like elite interviews, which open the possibility to compare, validate, or question broader literature strains, concepts, and ways of looking into the component of the Turkish state and its manifestations in terms of foreign policy. Therefore, the next section will explain on which bases and how these components are assembled into the structure of this thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview, see Pocock, J. G. (1962). The origins of study of the past: a comparative approach. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4(2), 209-246; Bachleitner, K. (2019). Diplomacy with memory: How the past is employed for future foreign policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 15(4), 492-508. Other references will be provided in a dedicated section.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of the "political field" is well introduced into the Middle East region by Zubaida, S. (2009).

## 2.2. Theoretical framework

Narratives come with their own specific modes of inclusion and exclusion. They determine what lessons historical records are assumed to offer, what evidence is deemed convincing and relevant, and what the possible future looks like. This is very much the case for International Relations.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.2.1. A Disciplinary Premise

In respect of the “history-politics boundary,” this project trusts the “acceptance of greater theoretical and disciplinary diversity” and the no longer “heated debate aimed at achieving theoretical hegemony,”<sup>10</sup> where diversity of (meta)theoretical perspective and analytical method is conventionally perceived as positive. This builds on the suggestion that theoretical diversity helps more comprehensive and multi-dimensional accounts of complex phenomena. The aim is to avoid a blind pluralism or “shallow eclecticism” that mainly produces mid-level theories with little regard for ontological and epistemological consistency.<sup>11</sup> A byproduct of such an understanding is its long-term chance to confute the realist framework “grounded within a Western parochial analysis of world politics, wherein intra-Western politics is presented as world politics.”<sup>12</sup> In this vein, it makes sense not only to engage with “World Politics” but also with “Global History” as “the history of entanglements and embeddedness that draws from a plurality of approaches and a ‘controlled eclecticism’.”<sup>13</sup>

With this reasoning in mind, this thesis embraces the understanding that combining different disciplines “subsumes, rather than supplants, existing knowledge – including well-known theories, methods, and scientific claims.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, combining FPA with History helps investigate the structural and systemic drivers of state behavior while acknowledging other sources of agency, such

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<sup>9</sup> Kessler & Leira, 2024, 435.

<sup>10</sup> Dunne, T., Hansen, L., & Wight, C. (2013). The end of International Relations theory?. *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(3), 405-425.

<sup>11</sup> Guzzini, S. (2013). The ends of International Relations theory: Stages of reflexivity and modes of theorizing. *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(3), 521–541.

<sup>12</sup> Hobson, J. M. (2012). *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. See also Meibauer, G., Desmaele, L., Onca, T., Kitchen, N., Foulon, M., Reichwein, A., & Sterling-Folker, J. (2021). Forum: Rethinking Neoclassical Realism at Theory’s End. *International Studies Review*, 23(1), 268–295.

<sup>13</sup> Osterhammel, J. (2016). Global History and Historical Sociology. In J. Belich, J. Darwin, & C. Wickham (Eds.), *The Prospect of Global History* (pp. 23–43). Oxford University Press, 27; While comparative in nature, Global history focuses on fluidity, flows, and liquidity of movements and change, as well as on processes and networks that leave old “national” and “regional” history writing behind. It also focuses on all sorts of global-local entanglements. Osterhammel furthermore raised the question of in what language and with the help of which concepts these changes can be studied without suppressing too much diversity, conjunctures, and contradictions. This discussion is outlined brilliantly by Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 37. See also Osterhammel, 2016, 38-41.

<sup>14</sup> Acharya, A. (2014). Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds. A New Agenda for International Studies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(4), 647-659; Hurrell, A. (2016). Beyond Critique: How to Study Global IR?. *International Studies Review*, 18(1), 149-151.

as culture or ideas. Knowledge drawn from the specific context of the case(s) under consideration complements existing theory by providing specified variants of parameters. This approach integrates context-specific insights and extends to reconsidering its intellectual canon.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, this way of engaging with history aims to a generalization within the systemic framework, which avoids the “butterfly effect” that “fetishizes the particular and the exceptional, failing to see how historical events are part of broader processes, sequences, and plots.”<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, such a dialog aims not to determine all relevant causes and processes accurately or to subsume all approaches under one synthesized theoretical umbrella.<sup>17</sup> Rather, in the case of FPA, it concerns presenting coherent and systematic designs to investigate when and how systemic parameters interact with contextual factors to produce a particular state behavior.

In sum, historians and leaders are both products of their own places, times, and generations, which in turn decide what “facts of the past” they determine into “facts of history.”<sup>18</sup> Any scholar who merely discusses these contemporary struggles without awareness of the history that shaped the terrain of preferences and actors will miss much of the central causal relevance to explaining politics and policymaking today.<sup>19</sup> Overall, it is precisely this “mixing and matching” of assumptions, issue areas, units, and interests that risk labeling this theorizing as merely “eclectic.” However, this operationalization has its own rationale. It can be indented as part of mid-level theories that should not be judged by their fit with pre-existing paradigms nor limited to particular methodologies.<sup>20</sup> Rather, they are best measured by their empirical power and ability to generate new propositions that are themselves empirically confirmed. This is because there are no primordial units of analysis but only methodological “bets” about which unit of aggregation is most likely to produce tractable and empirically robust explanations.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Zhang, C. (2017). Review Essay: How to Merge Western Theories and Chinese Indigenous Theories to Study Chinese Politics?. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 22(2), 283-294.

<sup>16</sup> Lawson, G. (2012). The eternal divide? History and international relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 18(2), 203-226.

<sup>17</sup> Lake, D. A. (2013). Theory is dead, long live theory: The end of the Great Debates and the rise of eclecticism in International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(3), 567-587; Lake, D. A. (2011). Why “isms” Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress: Why “isms” are Evil. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55(2), 465-480.

<sup>18</sup> Carr, E. H. (2007). What is history?: The George Macaulay Trevelyan lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge, January-March 1961. Penguin.

<sup>19</sup> Battistella, D. (2024). Raymond Aron: A neoclassical realist before the term existed? In A. Toje & B. Kunz (Eds.), *Neoclassical realism in European politics*. Manchester University Press; Kitchen, N. (2024). Ideas of power and the power of ideas: Systematising neoclassical realist theory. In A. Toje & B. Kunz (Eds.), *Neoclassical realism in European politics*. Manchester University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Sil, R., & Katzenstein, P. J. (2010). *Beyond paradigms: Analytic eclecticism in the study of world politics* (1. publ). Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>21</sup> Lake, 2013.

At this point, it is crucial to note two concepts that validate the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach that combines the tools of sub-branches of both IR and History: historicity and periodization.<sup>22</sup> The main critique is that significant portions of IR have traditionally neglected the analysis of historical contexts, viewing history as merely a backdrop rather than a dynamic element shaping the present and future. In contrast, historicity asserts that the past is not a completed chapter but is continuously enacted and reconstructed in the present.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, “historicity allows us to not only trace and theorize the presence of the past in international politics but, generally speaking, enables us to take into account the broader temporal dimension of international politics at large.”<sup>24</sup> In a complementary way, periodization provides a framework for organizing these historical continuities and ruptures into comprehensible segments, allowing for a structured understanding of historical dynamics. By trying to make sense of “historicity” and recalling Herbert Lüthy’s seminal work,<sup>25</sup> Schlichte and Stetter posit that the past should be central in understanding social and political relations, particularly in the context of global modernity. Specifically, the concept of “world history” view emphasizes that today’s political conflicts and cleavages are extensions of unresolved pasts, which manifest in various forms, including language, practices, and institutional structures.<sup>26</sup>

In this regard, it is crucial to stress that periodization – the practice of dividing history into distinct periods – complements historicity by providing the necessary structure to understand these continuous influences of the past.<sup>27</sup> Historical periods represent the temporal unfolding of specific spatial logics of interactions and are markers of transitions between different historical moments.<sup>28</sup>

As such, many authors offer perspectives highlighting the enduring influence of empires on contemporary international politics, showing how institutionalized forms of identity and exceptionality, a legacy of imperial pasts, remain a structural feature of domestic and international politics.<sup>29</sup> Important to note for a post-imperial country like Turkey is the fact that, for centuries,

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<sup>22</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 18.

<sup>23</sup> As Zarakol highlights, “Historicism has had different meanings and lives in the social sciences.” Zarakol, A. (2023). Can Historicism Win over IR? In K. Schlichte & S. Stetter (Eds.), *The Historicity of International Politics* (1st ed., pp. 291–302). Cambridge University Press, 1. See also Bevir, M. (2017). Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain, in Mark Bevir (ed.). *Historicism and the Human Sciences in Victorian Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 20.

<sup>25</sup> For an English version, see Lüthy, H. (1968). What’s the Point of History? *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3(2), 3–22.

<sup>26</sup> As Lüthy himself notes, “all the ‘un-dealt past’ is today present as a present-un-dealt.” Lüthy, quoted in Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 20.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Xavier Guillaume emphasizes that historical periods are not merely referential points but are constructed, reflecting the practice of writing history in IR. Idem. Guillaume, X. (2021). Historical Periods and the act of Periodisations. In B. de Carvalho, J. Costa Lopez, & H. Leira (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>28</sup> Idem.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview, see Çapan, Z. G., Dos Reis, F., & Grasten, M. (2021). Global Histories. In B. De Carvalho, J. Costa Lopez, & H. Leira (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations* (1st ed., pp. 521–529). Routledge.



empires, rather than states, were the main actors in international arenas.<sup>30</sup> Another insight is about the rise of populism and authoritarianism that challenges the liberal international order since, for many global populations, international order has never been genuinely liberal.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard, Hobson and Lawson's contributions<sup>32</sup> mark a turning point in recognizing the significance of historical institutional parameters in international society.<sup>33</sup> The emergence and evolution of primary institutions such as diplomacy, war, trade, and human rights are historically contingent.<sup>34</sup> In addition to this, an overtly structuralist understanding of history is challenged by the concept of "eventful history," in which stubborn durability goes hand in hand with sudden breaks.<sup>35</sup> The aim of comparisons is then not to establish causal laws but to theorize and explain historical developments in each case.<sup>36</sup>

Here, the role of periodization is fundamental. Antoine Prost articulates that creating a period is substituting time's elusive continuity, a meaningful structure.<sup>37</sup> However, this meaningful structure is inherently plural and constructed, revealing the values and ideologies of those who create it.<sup>38</sup> As such, if a historical period is a construct, the question becomes not why but how to periodize. As periods are artificial and attempt at a heuristic rationalization, they also risk being a "simplification and a flattening of historical reality."<sup>39</sup>

In a similar fashion, Fernand Braudel's distinction of three levels of temporality<sup>40</sup> – events, cycles and conjunctures, and long-term structures – further illustrates how historicity and periodization can be integrated. Understanding a context requires recognizing the *longue durée*, the long-term historical formations that shape social and political realities.<sup>41</sup> From this reasoning, we can assert that the historicity of foreign policy, often obscured by superficial categorizations, requires a

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<sup>30</sup> De Carvalho, B., Leira, H., & Hobson, J. M. (2011). The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39(3), 735–758

<sup>31</sup> Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Hobson, J. M., & Lawson, G. (2008). What is History in International Relations? *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 37(2), 415–435.

<sup>33</sup> Buzan, B. (2004). *From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>34</sup> Reus-Smit, C. (1999). The moral purpose of the state: Culture, social identity, and institutional rationality in international relations. Princeton Univ. Press; Reus-Smit, C., & Dunne, T. (2017). The Globalization of International Society. In T. Dunne & C. Reus-Smit (Eds.), *The Globalization of International Society* (pp. 18–40). Oxford University Press.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.; Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 38.

<sup>37</sup> Prost, A. (1996). *Douze leçons sur l'histoire*. Éd. du Seuil.

<sup>38</sup> Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 39.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–42.

<sup>40</sup> Braudel, F. (1960). History and the Social Sciences: The Long Duration. *Political Research, Organization and Design*, 3(6), 3–13.

<sup>41</sup> *Idem*. Retrieved from his original book, Braudel, F. (1969). Histoire et sciences sociales: la longue durée, in F. Braudel (ed.), *Écrits sur l'histoire*, Paris: Flammarion., 45. Braudel explains, "The first is the layer of events and of news that constitutes most of what we call political history. [It is] the most treacherous [...] we hardly see its flame and we can only judge its importance if we assess its impacts on the two other layers."

nuanced understanding of historical contexts and their impact on present-day politics.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Historians of International Relations are now cautioning against an understanding of a smooth flow of a homogeneous time, stressing discontinuities, ruptures, and turning points instead since

Often, coincidence matters more than strict causalities. These convulsions of big events, sudden ruptures, contrasted by long stagnation and stable institutional settings, create a *temps mondial* of its own.<sup>43</sup>

Another crucial aspect to note is that the presence of the past in international politics also involves analyzing power relations. Post-colonial hierarchies and other sedimented forms of power become visible through historical analysis. The concept of historicity counters rationalist interpretations that overlook historical formations and emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical processes behind the formation of states and international organizations.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, accepting the historicity of international politics does not imply historical determinism.<sup>45</sup> Change is possible and observable, with punctuating events shaping the social world. Historicity highlights the complex temporal nature of present-day politics and emphasizes the coexistence of multiple temporalities, challenging simplistic linear perspectives of history.<sup>46</sup>

Periodization, meanwhile, organizes these historical insights into structured periods, offering a framework to understand the temporal dynamics at play. This process involves defining historical periods by marking segments of time, which helps organize and make sense of historical events and trends. However, periodization is not without its challenges. As Guillaume points out, it can lead to oversimplification and anachronism, where contemporary concepts are inappropriately applied to historical contexts.<sup>47</sup> These acts of periodization tend to privilege rupture as a modality in segmenting the past. Furthermore, IR generally takes Europe, or more broadly the West, as its starting and ending point, using it as the conceptual matrix to design and define historical periods. This reliance on the logic of ruptures in Historical IR is epitomized by the concept of benchmark dates.<sup>48</sup>

In this sense, reflecting on the act of periodization offers at least two potential directions for improvement. Firstly, there is a need to research the “*discontinuous continuities*” of multiple histories

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<sup>42</sup> For Schlichte and Stetter, they are superficial categorizations as ‘historical reasons’ or ‘geopolitical interest’, or, as in liberal constructivism, as ‘norms’ or ‘ideas’ that matter. Schlichte & Stetter, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Laïdi, Z. (1999). *Le temps mondial*, Bruxelles: Editions Complexes. Quoted in Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Idem.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>47</sup> Idem.

<sup>48</sup> Le Goff, J. (2014). *Il tempo continuo della storia*, 137.

in light of contemporary connected and global histories.<sup>49</sup> Historical IR scholars should strive to clearly unveil “*homochronism*” and problematize their situatedness, making apparent their historiographic rationality and their working hypotheses without falling into such totalizing discourse.<sup>50</sup> Secondly, another challenge is “*anachronism*”<sup>51</sup>, which involves using categories, concepts, or chrononyms such as the Renaissance or Westphalia that would be unintelligible to the figures being described. Against this backdrop, in the latest Historical IR scholarship<sup>52</sup>, there is an invitation to shift away from a political, historical focus to a social, historical one, emphasizing historical rhythms rather than merely temporal segments.<sup>53</sup> This involves designing historical periods that are not attached to the political, historical IR narrative but rather to a more social history of the international, connected to “the every-day rather than merely elites.”<sup>54</sup>

To sum up, historicity and periodization are interlinked yet distinct concepts essential for a comprehensive understanding of international politics. Historicity emphasizes the continuous influence of the past on the present and future, while periodization provides the structure to organize and interpret these influences. Together, they offer a nuanced framework for analyzing the temporal dynamics that shape international relations, acknowledging both the continuous presence of the past and the structured segmentation of historical periods. This integrated approach allows for a more profound and contextual understanding of international politics, moving beyond simplistic and linear interpretations to embrace the complexity and fluidity of historical and contemporary dynamics.

### 2.2.2. A Theoretical Premise

In practical terms, for the scope of this thesis, these discussions are reflected in some main aspects. First, “periodization of the Turkish foreign policy may be seen as a method where prioritizing different actors act as dominant decision-makers which are either political leaders, state institutions

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<sup>49</sup> Idem. Here the author quotes Revel, J. (2004). Michel Foucault: Discontinuité de la pensée ou pensée du discontinu ? *Le Portique*, 13–14. See also Birth, K. (2008). The creation of coevalness and the danger of homochronism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14(1), 3–20

<sup>50</sup> Douki, C., & Minard, P. (2007). Histoire globale, histoires connectées: Un changement d’échelle historiographique ? : Introduction. *Revue d’histoire Moderne & Contemporaine*, n° 54-4bis(5), 7–21.

<sup>51</sup> Birth, 2008, 15, 16.

<sup>52</sup> About these conceptions, see, for instance, Strayer, R. W., ed. (1995). *The Making of the Modern World: Connected Histories, Divergent Paths (1500 to the Present)*. 2nd edition. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press; Subrahmanyam, S. (2007). Holding the world in balance: the connected histories of the Iberian overseas empires, 1500–1640. *American Historical Review*, 112 (5), 1359–1385; Sachsenmaier, D. (2011). *Global Perspectives on Global History. Theories and Approaches in a Connected World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Çapan, & Grasten, 2021..

<sup>53</sup> Schmidt, B. C. (2013). On the History and Historiography of International Relations. In W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse, & B. Simmons (Eds.), *Handbook of International Relations*. SAGE Publications Ltd.; Ashworth, L. M. (2014). *A history of International Thought. From the Origins of the Modern State to Academic International Relations*. London: Routledge; Ashworth, L. M. (2021). *Disciplinary Traditions and Debates: The Subject Matters of International Thought*. In B. de Carvalho, J. Costa Lopez, & H. Leira (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>54</sup> Guillaume, 2021, 567.

or non-state institutions.”<sup>55</sup> Although each of the different possible periodizations is plausible, this thesis focuses on dividing each analytical by following two-faceted criteria: one being the main structure of the international system as the main periodization in which type of the government was/is operating; the other being a “thematic-periodization” based on the main critical alterations occurring within Turkey’s internal level – such as institutional changes, ideological debates, the emersion of new political figures –, which do not necessarily parallel with the external level (the international and regional level).

Second, compared to grand theories that do not reach out into the inside mechanisms of the black box of the state, middle-range theories seem more promising in understanding the operating principles of the state in foreign policy making. Those middle-range theories, each of which focuses on either institutions, leaders, or processes, bring a greater understanding of foreign policy analysis. Because the main point of this thesis is to understand the relationship between internal and external parameters leaders throughout different periods of Turkish foreign policy, it is necessary to bring a hybrid and holistic approach where the historical events, systemic parameters, political leaders, state institutions, legal perspective, and external sources are all added into a single framework. That is why bringing a complex and multi-dimensional approach to understanding the relationship between leaders, institutions, and processes in foreign policy making is preferred in this thesis.

Indeed, to provide a more comprehensive analysis that overcomes the risk of privileging only macro-descriptions of structures and discarding micro-narratives about agents, this thesis has followed a double-faceted periodization. On the one hand, while ruptures in the system (e.g., the end of the Cold War or the events linked to 9/11) provided a general framework to analyze how TFP reacted and evolved, also ruptures at the domestic (e.g., the emergence of Islamism, the military coups, coalition governments) and leadership (e.g., the centrality of figures like Özal, Erbakan, or Erdoğan) levels constituted a main role. On the other hand, this had implications for the selection of the sources. As will be further clarified in the methodological section, such a multilayered periodization is required to rely on both primary and secondary sources. Especially about primary ones, this included archives of the MFA, Grand National Assembly, and Presidential Office, but also memos, biographies, and interviews by former politicians and diplomats. In addition, this was complemented with semi-structured interviews with relevant figures in the fields concerning TFP. What these two modes of construction and deconstruction share is the selection operated by the author. While acknowledging that the selection of sources and interviewees is inevitably biased

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<sup>55</sup> Kürkçü, B. (2019). Decision-Making Process in Turkish Foreign Policy Crises: The Role of State and Institutions During Süleyman Demirel Administrations [PhD Thesis]. MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY, 51.

because of the researcher's positionalities,<sup>56</sup> having a double-fledged apparatus of resources helped de-hierarchize the levels of analysis and offered a perspective that considers the units of analysis having the same (or different) value according to the macro or micro-periodization chosen for a specific issue at stake. Basically, the discipline of history has its critical role here as its discussions are attempts to develop contests about the plausibility of different interpretations, including the methods on how such plausibility can be established, what a sufficient number of sources is for what kind of statement, and how to weigh plausibility.<sup>57</sup>

Working hypotheses are not something that needs to be 'tested' in a 'positivist' sense, but rather a series of starting assumptions and premises – from the referent literature to someone's conceptual and critical apparatus which are central in shaping a historical research's contours and how such research will be written within thus defined temporal boundaries.”<sup>58</sup>

As such, considering the external, internal, and individual levels where TFP is elaborated and shaped allows to embrace the concepts (described above) of “eventful history,” in which stubborn durability goes hand in hand with sudden breaks.

Yet, on the premise that “grounding the multifaceted change in Turkish Foreign Policy on a sound theoretical basis remains a challenge for scholars”<sup>59</sup>, this project considers some preliminary postulations. As surveyed in the literature review, many of the extensive works on TFP present no coherent theoretical framework that moves beyond idiosyncratic historical narratives of relations with specific regions/countries and considers domestic and environmental changes without hierarchical logic. At the same time, if it is undeniable that Turkey's actions – as for all middle powers – are indeed constrained by the external environment, it should also be recognized that domestic changes affect the decision-making process due to factors like institutional divergences, elite perceptions, and public contestation. Considering this intertwining, most of the literature fails to explain the continuity of foreign policy under different governments and the policy changes that occur under the same government rule. Therefore, parameters that bridge the environmental effects and domestic mechanisms must be included to analyze why Turkey behaves in a certain way (foreign policy behavior and outcomes) and demonstrate that TFP under the AKP is not an anomaly overall (foreign policy change as a process). Against this background, TFP can be better studied as a phenomenon under constant variability that is best understood by applying different levels of analysis instead of a

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<sup>56</sup> On this issue, see Amoureux, J. L., & Steele, B. J. (Eds.). (2016). *Reflexivity and international relations: Positionality, critique, and practice*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group; Marguin, S., Haus, J., Heinrich, A. J., Kahl, A., Schendzielorz, C., & Singh, A. (2021). Positionality Reloaded. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 46(2), 7-34.

<sup>57</sup> Schlichte & Stetter, 2023, 43.

<sup>58</sup> Guillaume, 2021, 563.

<sup>59</sup> Hatipoglu & Palmer, 2016.

rigid set of variables. Moreover, though far from assuming a deterministic posture, it is essential to acknowledge that looking at the leadership, party politics, and their relationship with public opinion concerning foreign policy questions is another crucial element in dissecting the complexity of both processes and outcomes in TFP. That is why, instead of relying on variable selection, this research relies interchangeably on the concepts of “parameters” and “factors,” which allow for more flexibility in selectivity, hierarchy, and changeability.<sup>60</sup>

In order to solve the puzzle, this project builds upon three main pillars. First, attempts to avoid the “IR vs. Political sciences vs. History boundary problem” require recalling that “rather than imposing general labels on states, we should aim to understand the development of the international system by trying to explain the varying forms which foreign policies could take in different situations and at different times.”<sup>61</sup> Within this setting, some elements are foremost valid for an interdisciplinary examination of TFP: (1) the nature of the domestic political regime, including the balance of power *within* and composition *of* the policy-making system; (2) socio-economic dynamics; (3) national security; (4) external and structural circumstances. Secondly, since the ultimate transformation of the international system and states’ reaction to these shifts have proved to be particularly affected by the local-global nexus, it has become even more indispensable to ponder both structural and domestic features.<sup>62</sup> Third, since the literature on TFP has expanded to analyze the impact of the relation between policy changes and the role of leaders, bureaucracies, and public opinion, another aim is to address how this relates to the concept of change regarding foreign policy-making and empirical outcomes.

Therefore, the general argument is that, though systemic and structural parameters are relevant in bringing about change in TFP, the character of the changes – i.e., how Turkey responds to external stimuli – depends on several other parameters that operate at different levels. As the following sections will explain in detail, such a multilevel analysis implies building a specific theoretical framework to overcome rigid disciplinary debates and provide an overarching explanation of Turkey’s foreign policy change. In this sense, crucial to underline is that the aim is not to discard any theory *a priori* but rather to facilitate the integration of existing theories through a more flexible

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<sup>60</sup> Friedrichs, J., & Kratochwil, F. (2009). On Acting and Knowing: How Pragmatism Can Advance International Relations Research and Methodology. *International Organization*, 63(4), 701–731.; Rosenau, J. N. (2018). *Turbulence in world politics: A theory of change and continuity*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>61</sup> Aydın, 1994; Soñmez, 2017.

<sup>62</sup> De Franco, C. (2023). Connecting the Local and the Global: International Practice Theory as a Trading Zone for International Relations and Area Studies Scholars. In S. D’Amato, M. Dian, & A. Russo (Eds.), *International Relations and Area Studies* (pp. 93–109). Springer International Publishing; Cerioli, L. (2024). Neoclassical Realism, Global International Relations, and the unheard echoes of Realist practices from the South. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 0(0).

approach that highly appreciates the value of a historical perspective in terms of resources, detection of crucial events, and selection of parameters.

First, this chapter starts with an overview of what Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is and why it represents the most valid approach to building a comprehensive study on TFP. The sub-branch of Foreign Policy Change (FPC) is explained in light of the necessity to set the parameters in a contextualized theoretical framework that helps explain the change process by looking at empirical outcomes. In this regard, it elucidates how this research does not prioritize domestic-level variables that determine policy outcomes like traditional Foreign Policy Analysis. Instead, by following the latest FPA scholarship concentrated on the concept of “change” and enriching the model proposed by Altunışık and Martin to analyze TFP, it stresses the importance of the mutual interaction of the level of analysis in bringing about the specific strain of investigation about Foreign Policy Change. This is operated with the scope to prove that “the interaction between the level of analysis involves a two-way effect, rather than a one-way causal effect” and that “the action that initiates the FPC may occur at the leadership, state, regional or the global level.”<sup>63</sup> As such, a crucial premise is that none of these levels of analysis necessarily results in foreign policy change, but it is more than their interaction that affects the nature of the change.

Then, the first level of analysis (the external level) is introduced by a discussion on how the category mentioned above of those “third-way” analyses – especially Neoclassical Realism and Complex Realism from the International Relations of the Middle East (IRME) – offers attempts to include domestic factors while maintaining the importance of constraints and opportunities deriving from external and systemic structures. However, the following subsection clarifies how this research selects external parameters according to their importance for the regional and/or international dimensions influencing TFP rather than – as for most IR scholars – according to their absolute value as independent variables. In this sense, the recent “domestic turn of IR” is pushed further to demonstrate how relying on Foreign Policy Analysis methods is more suitable for the goal of de-hierarchizing the relationship between these different levels and to stress the importance of the agent other than the structure. Then, the inclusion of a third level of analysis (the individual) is justified based on two assumptions. First, there is a constant interaction between political leadership and various domestic and international factors. Second, the transformative power of political leadership cannot be fully understood without considering the effects of domestic politics and the international system. All these three sub-sections address which specific aspects of each level are considered and

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<sup>63</sup> Altunışık & Martin, 2023, 81.

synthesize different FPA models to justify the choice of particular policy areas, agents, and political developments.

Fourth, in coherence with the latest developments in FPA, the chapter provides a theoretical overview of the reasons why adopting a historical dimension to the analysis does not merely represent a move towards an “eclectic” approach but also a necessity to address the concept of continuation and change more efficiently and in a detailed way by surveying a longer time-frame. Finally, the last section provides a methodological overview to show how this theoretical framework is applied to the specific TFP case, the data collection process through fieldwork, and how everything is operationalized within the second part of the research.

### **2.2.3. Foreign Policy Analysis. An overview**

As defined by Alden et al., “the study of foreign policy is an ever-changing story of how states, institutions, and peoples engage with one another within a dynamic international system.”<sup>64</sup> Shaped by history and institutional practices, foreign policymakers navigate the increasingly blurred lines between domestic politics and external environments using instruments as varied as the military, diplomacy, sanctions, and new media to produce policies that further state interests. In a nutshell, FPA is the study of the conduct and practice of relations between different actors, primarily states, in the international system. At the core of this field is an investigation into decision-making dynamics, the individual decision-makers, processes, and conditions that affect foreign policy, and the outcomes of these decisions. By adopting this approach, FPA is essentially concerned not only with the actors involved in the state’s formal decision-making apparatus but also with the variety of sub-national sources of influence upon state foreign policy. Moreover, in seeking to provide a fuller explanation for foreign policy choice, FPA scholars have to consider the boundaries between the state’s internal or domestic dimension and the external environment.<sup>65</sup> Overall, FPA is considered “a vibrant subfield of IR with roots in the 1950s”<sup>66</sup> and

It refers to a complex, multilayered process consisting of the objectives governments pursue in their relations with other governments and their choice of means to attain these objectives...Thus, foreign policy encompasses the complicated communications within governments and amongst its diverse agents, plus the perceptions and misperceptions, the images of other countries, and the ideologies and

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<sup>64</sup> Alden, C., Aran, A., & Alves, A. C. (2017). *Foreign policy analysis: New approaches* (Second edition). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>65</sup> Kaarbo, J., & Thies, C. (2024). *The Oxford handbook of foreign policy analysis*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>66</sup> Kaarbo, 2015, 190.



personal dispositions of everyone involved. An essential part of the study of foreign policy has been the nature and impact of domestic politics.<sup>67</sup>

FPA emerged as a distinct subfield within the IR discipline due to its initial exclusive focus on the practical conduct of inter-state relations and its normative motivations. Unlike IR, which often emphasizes foreign policy outcomes, FPA concentrates on the foreign policy process. This emphasis is predicated on the belief that a detailed examination of the actors involved, their motivations, the structures of decision-making, and the broader context within which foreign policy decisions are formulated offers greater analytical depth. A recurring theme in FPA is the “structure–agency” debate.<sup>68</sup> Similar to other branches of the social sciences, FPA scholars are divided on the extent to which structural factors (the constraints imposed by the international system) and human agency (the role of individual choice in shaping the international system) should be emphasized when analyzing foreign policy decisions and decision-making environments.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, FPA’s focus on the process of foreign policy formulation, the role of decision-makers, and the nature of foreign policy choices has generally resulted in a stronger emphasis on agency compared to IR.<sup>70</sup>

FPA has much in common with other policy-oriented fields that seek to employ scientific means to understand phenomena. As perceived by other IR scholars, this seemingly eclectic borrowing from other fields reflects the intellectual alignment with evolving currents of thought within various policy sciences. Simultaneously, for this research on Turkish Foreign Policy, it is crucial to note that a significant branch of FPA heavily relies on historical methods.<sup>71</sup> Understanding the role of history in shaping foreign policy – whether through the identity of a particular nation-state, differing interpretations of specific foreign policy issues, or their analogous use (and misuse) in foreign policy decision-making – constitutes an affluent area of study within FPA.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, one can safely say that the roots of FPA lie in its reaction to the dominance of realism and its depiction of the state and its interactions with other states, whether through direct bilateral relations or through multilateral institutions, and a general dissatisfaction with realism’s ability to

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<sup>67</sup> Kubalkova, V. (2016). *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (1st ed.). Routledge, 17-18.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion in the context of FPA, see Carlsnaes, W. (1992). The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis. *International Studies Quarterly*, 36(3), 245-270.

<sup>69</sup> Singer, 1961.

<sup>70</sup> Houghton, D. P. (2007). Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 3(1), 24–45.

<sup>71</sup> For an overview, see Fahrmeir, A. (2017). Historiography of Foreign Policy Analysis. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Some specific works are Blanchard, J. M. F., & Lin, K. C. (2013). Contemplating Chinese foreign policy: approaches to the use of historical analysis. *Pacific Focus*, 28(2), 145-169; Vertzberger, Y. Y. (1986). Foreign policy decisionmakers as practical-intuitive historians: Applied history and its shortcomings. *International Studies Quarterly*, 30(2), 223-247; Ghalehdar, P. (2022). Historical Analysis. In P. A. Mello & F. Ostermann, *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods* (1st ed.). Routledge.

<sup>72</sup> Brands, H., & Suri, J. (Eds.). (2015). *The power of the past: History and Statecraft*. Brookings Institution Press.

provide credible explanations of foreign policy outcomes.<sup>73</sup> Within the realist paradigm, the state is seen as a unitary and rational actor, rendering it unnecessary to analyze the role of the discrete components of government (either the executive or the legislature) to assess state foreign policy. In this context, a key concept in the traditional realist canon is “national interest,” defined by Hans Morgenthau as synonymous with power and, therefore, both the proper object of a state’s foreign policy and the best measure of its capacity to achieve its aims.<sup>74</sup> What constitutes national interest and how it is determined and ultimately implemented are crucial to understanding the choices and responses pursued by states in international affairs. Realists assert that the anarchic nature of the international system is the most crucial guide to interpreting foreign policy. Together with power, geographic position, material resources, and demography are other essential components of this equation. Realists assert that all states’ foreign policies adhere to these fundamental parameters and emphasize that scholars should primarily examine the influences of the international system’s structure and the relative power of states to comprehend the outcomes of foreign policy decisions.

Against this view, scholars dissatisfied with the simplistic interpretations of international events prevalent in established IR circles advocated for a departure from this systemic orientation by “opening the black box” of foreign policy decision-making.<sup>75</sup> Instead of offering a normative critique of realism, early FPA scholars focused primarily on developing an improved methodological framework for analyzing state interactions. While they accepted fundamental realist tenets, such as the centrality of the state, they also initiated a series of investigative approaches that ultimately expanded the knowledge and understanding of the relationship between foreign policy and international relations. In this sense, as Juliet Kaarbo notes,

Foreign policy analysis is not a conglomeration of realism, liberalism, and constructivism – it would challenge each’s critical ontological and theoretical aspects. But as IR theories have turned toward domestic and decision-making variables, the FPA perspective can bring them together. This integration is important as each theory is developing along different trajectories with regard to these factors. [...] Consequently, FPA has a separate response to each of these developments, has something to offer each of these avenues of thought, and covers all of them, thus offering a bridge for this significant domestic and decision-making turn in IR theory.<sup>76</sup>

In other words, FPA offers an alternative perspective by emphasizing the role of the decision-makers, highlighting how they interpret and respond to the domestic and international environment

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<sup>73</sup> Alden et al., 2017, 5.

<sup>74</sup> See Morgenthau, H. J., Thompson, K. W., & Clinton, W. D. (2006). *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace* (7th ed). McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

<sup>75</sup> Snyder, J. L. (1994). *Myths of empire: Domestic politics and international ambition* (2. print). Cornell Univ. Press; Sprout, H., & Sprout, M. (1957); Environmental Factors in the Study of International Politics. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1(4), 309–328; Rosenau, J. N. (2006). *The Study of World Politics*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.

<sup>76</sup> Kaarbo, 2015.

based on psychological, societal, ideational, political, institutional, and material factors.<sup>77</sup> This approach has emerged partly due to the artificial separation between “internal” and “external” politics and the agent-structure problem that troubled predominantly structural IR theories.<sup>78</sup>

Different from traditional IR, which often prioritizes the international system as the primary analytical focus, FPA considers this presumption methodologically biased and theoretically incoherent.<sup>79</sup> By incorporating multiple levels of analysis and both material and ideational factors, FPA provides a more ontologically comprehensive understanding of domestic politics and decision-making. All in all, following Kaarbo’s seminal works, FPA can be simultaneously seen as a subfield (an area of research) and a distinct perspective (or approach). First, FPA is a subfield or area of study because it includes scholarship with foreign policy processes or behaviors as the explicit explanandum and domestic and decision-making factors as the starting place for explanations. FPA research does not, by definition, ignore external factors – much of the research in this area takes the difference between domestic and foreign policy seriously. Second, FPA can be conceptualized as a distinct perspective or approach because it stresses the central decision-making unit’s role and leaders’ subjective understandings as funnels for other international and domestic factors, including the institutional and societal factors in the broader FPA subfield.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, FPA research can contribute to the trend toward the kind of “balanced analytic eclecticism”<sup>81</sup>, which this thesis also relies on. Indeed, although this approach stems from the belief that a multilevel and multidisciplinary stance is particularly beneficial for the study of TFP, its theoretical framework is built – as the following paragraphs explain – on new alternative theories developed in the disciplinary “sub-branch” of Foreign Policy Change.

#### **2.2.4. Foreign Policy Change: A Multidisciplinary Approach**

As the latest Historical turn in IR suggests, “one way of moving on [...] is to problematize the linear understanding and analyze the ways in which the past, present, and future are connected.”<sup>82</sup> According to many scholars, “change” has long been a neglected aspect of studying foreign policy.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hudson 2005.

<sup>78</sup> Hayes, J. (2018). Agency and Structure in Foreign Policy Analysis. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

<sup>79</sup> Moravcsik, A. (1997). Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics. *International Organization*, 51(4), 516

<sup>80</sup> Kaarbo, 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Sil & Katzenstein 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Kessler & Leira, 2024, 434.

<sup>83</sup> Alden et al., 2017, 125; Gustavsson, J. (1999). How should we study foreign policy change?. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34(1), 73-95; Hill, C. (2003). *The changing politics of foreign policy* (pp. 127-128). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Blavoukos, S., &

Similar to the field of IR, which notoriously could not account for the rapid events that precipitated the ending of the Cold War, FPA tells us little about the sources and conditions that give rise to significant alteration to state foreign policy. Charles Hermann highlighted this shortcoming in his call for a greater integration of change dynamics in theories of foreign policy.<sup>84</sup> In the last few years, FPC has subsided both FPA and IR with new and expanded analytical theories to better address the various shades of change by incorporating various elements from Political Sciences and History.

The study of FPC has proliferated since the end of the Cold War, yet without the emergence of a general theoretical framework. Moreover, as argued by Gustavsson<sup>85</sup>, “a good definition of foreign policy change requires a definition of foreign policy,” but the field exhibits no consensus concerning either term.<sup>86</sup> Offering a helpful working definition, Hill defines foreign policy as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations.”<sup>87</sup> While this definition puts the focus on outputs and argues that “foreign (or health, or education) policy is about the effort to carry through some generally conceived strategy”<sup>88</sup>, other classifications treat rules (guides to action)<sup>89</sup> as a second component of foreign policy in addition to the action itself. For instance, Morin and Paquin define a foreign policy that includes behavioral patterns, plans, and programs as “a set of actions or rules governing the actions of an independent political authority deployed in the international environment.”<sup>90</sup> Foreign policy is, thus, outlined as a pattern of behavior repeated more than a restricted number of times and characterized by a degree of continuity.

As a consequence, we can define change as the replacement of this pattern with a new pattern. Since foreign policy is constantly subjected to minor adjustments and modifications, scholarship focuses on fundamental changes in foreign policies.<sup>91</sup> However, as argued by Goldman<sup>92</sup>, foreign policy not only refers to a line of action an agent explicitly declares to follow – for example, in official

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Bourantonis, D. (2014). Identifying parameters of foreign policy change: An eclectic approach. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 49(4), 483–500.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Hermann acknowledged that the ending of the Cold War brought about a focus on incorporating change in the FPA agenda. See Hermann, C. F. (1995). Epilogue: Reflections on foreign policy theory building. In L. Neack, J. A. K. Hey, & P. J. Haney (Eds.), *Foreign policy analysis: Continuity and change in its second generation*. Prentice Hall; This is despite at least one earlier study of the impact of major system change on foreign policy alignments, Holsti, K., Monterichard, M., Msabaha, I., Robinson, T. W., Shaw, T. M., & Zylberberg, J. (2016). *Why nations realign: Foreign policy restructuring in the postwar world*. Routledge See also Rosati, J. A., Hagan, J. D., & Sampson, M. W. (1994). *Foreign policy restructuring: How governments respond to global change*. University of South Carolina press.

<sup>85</sup> Gustavsson, 1999.

<sup>86</sup> Ghalehdar, 2022, 436.

<sup>87</sup> Hill, C. (2006). *The changing politics of foreign policy* (6. print). Palgrave Macmillan, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>89</sup> Snyder et al., 2002, 74.

<sup>90</sup> Morin, J.-F., & Paquin, J. (2018). *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox*. Springer International Publishing, 3.

<sup>91</sup> Hermann, 1990, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Goldman, K. (1982). Change and Stability in Foreign Policy: Detente as a Problem of Stabilization. *World Politics*, 34(2), 230–266.

documents or speeches – but can also refer to a non-verbalized line of action. Patterns of foreign policy behavior can change significantly without (or prior to) adopting a formal program.<sup>93</sup> This alternative view suggests not clustering actions altogether and draws a conceptual distinction between action and decision: “Some decisions may never result in action, but while leaving no action artifact, such decisions are as likely to be as important as decisions to act and therefore deserve scrutiny.”<sup>94</sup>

Within this context, the literature on FPC distinguishes different levels of change. Early conceptualizations suggest that it encompasses a broad range of empirical phenomena that vary on three qualitative dimensions.<sup>95</sup> Rosati offers a quantitative categorization that includes four levels: intensification, refinement, reform, and restructuring.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, while the literature has identified an increasingly long list of conditions that potentially explain foreign policy change, it has yet to develop a more general theoretical framework that captures the interplay between explanations from different levels of analysis.<sup>97</sup> As Haesebrouck and Joly have underlined, if we consider that fundamental foreign policy change might manifest as the cumulative result of many incremental changes, then scholarship might have failed to uncover several more fundamental foreign policy changes. Building on this critique, they have recently provided a more comprehensive definition on which the present research also relies:

Foreign policy change replaces a continuous pattern of action towards external actors or the rules guiding such actions with a new pattern or rules that pursue different goals and use different methods. The latter can result from a dramatic break with the past or a cumulative effect of more minor changes. Foreign policy change can be limited to a specific foreign policy issue or a bilateral relation, more extensively involving a broader foreign policy domain like security or aid policy, or about a simultaneous change across different foreign policy domains and relations, amounting to a fundamental redirection of the actor’s entire orientation towards world affairs.<sup>98</sup>

What is even more important for how this thesis intends to study the specific case of Turkish Foreign Policy is the fact that there is a growing consensus in the field of foreign policy studies that investigating foreign policy change requires attention to three levels of analysis: the international level, the domestic level, and the individual level.<sup>99</sup> For instance, Hermann’s pioneering studies on

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<sup>93</sup> Holsti etl a. 2016, 114.

<sup>94</sup> Hudson, V. M., & Day, B. S. (2020). *Foreign policy analysis: Classic and contemporary theory* (3. Auflage). Rowman & Littlefield, 5.

<sup>95</sup> First, it can refer to changes in the goals of a foreign policy, the means used to pursue these goals, or both. Second, the extensiveness of foreign policy change can vary substantially, ranging from a change in a country’s policy toward one specific foreign policy issue or in only one sector to a simultaneous shift in many foreign policies. Finally, foreign policy change can involve a dramatic break with past behavior or the cumulative effect of incremental changes. See Hermann, 1990.

<sup>96</sup> Rosati, 1994, 236.

<sup>97</sup> Joly & Haesebrouck, 2021, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Hermann, 1990; Gustavsson, 1999; Haar, R. N., & Pierce, J. J. (2021). Foreign Policy Change from an Advocacy Coalition Framework Perspective. *International Studies Review*, 23(4), 1771–1791.

FPC essentially used this framework by focusing on the domestic and individual levels and referring to the external environment as a stimulus for FPC.<sup>100</sup> However, FPC needs more discussion about international-level variables and how they are linked with the domestic and leadership levels. Scholars mainly identify systemic conditions and specific policies of external powers that affect FPC by leading states to reconceptualize security threats or systemically allow more policy flexibility. Finally, the international environment presents challenges and opportunities that may lead to FPC.

This explains why there is a general acquiescence in FPA nowadays that different levels of analysis should be studied in parallel, combining individual factors, inputs in the decision-making process, and institutional features of the decision-making process itself, as well as cultural and societal, domestic and international, factors.<sup>101</sup> The central assumption is that, in the real world, action in the foreign policy domain combines purposive behavior, cognitive-psychological factors, and several structural features that characterize and affect states' interaction. Hence, the analysis of any foreign policy action can neither exclude nor privilege any of these types of explanans but assess each parameter's relevance and explanatory value on a case-by-case basis.<sup>102</sup>

Embarking on exploring dynamics of change in Turkish Foreign Policy, this study adopts what some would call an eclectic approach, intertwining Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) theories with a profound historical lens. Departing from a narrow hierarchical understanding of pre-determined variables, the focus shifts towards unraveling the nuanced lines of continuity and change within different periods, even within the same governments in office. Several recent publications have examined foreign policy change over a longer timeframe. Haugom, for example, examines how Turkish foreign policy has changed after Erdogan became President in 2014.<sup>103</sup> His analysis shows that there have been significant changes in Turkish foreign policy, resulting in a strong focus on national security, an assertive style in policy implementation, a preference for transaction-based relations, and a quest for more strategic autonomy. However, compared to earlier periods, these features of Turkish foreign policy represent both change and continuity and do not represent a change in Turkey's overall orientation. Coherently, one main argument of the present work is that the rise of the AKP to power brought about a new set of ideas and beliefs with historical depth at the elite level,

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<sup>100</sup> Hermann, 1990.

<sup>101</sup> Mintz, A., & DeRouen Jr, K. (2010). *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press., 3-4.

<sup>102</sup> Carlsnaes, 2016; Synthetic approaches have been used in the past to account, for example, for the Soviet foreign policy re-direction in the Gorbachev era, integrating not only domestic and international levels of analysis (Checkel, 1993), but also structure and agency in an attempt to bridge the gap between realist and constructivist perspectives in IR (Snyder, 2005). See Checkel, J. (1993). Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution. *World Politics*, 45(2), 271-300; Mansfield, E. D., & Snyder, J. L. (2005). *Electing to fight: Why emerging democracies go to war*. MIT Press.

<sup>103</sup> Haugom, 2019.

which have been maintained and reproduced throughout history *via* certain ideological currents and segments of society and politics. Therefore, the AKP elite's ideas are an extension and expression of larger identity and ideological dynamics as well as existing collective expectations among the society that have been mobilized by – and capitalized on – the government. These processes have consolidated and institutionalized some practices that function as an additional parameter in policy- and decision-making, thus producing different foreign policy outcomes than those produced by the previous establishment in response to external geopolitical/systemic stimuli.<sup>104</sup> Thus, if the aim is to identify and measure the degree of change in the evolutionary ambiguous phase of TFP, this study contemplates the idea that “those individual policies that a state adopts in pursuit of its interests should be viewed as a portfolio producing change and/or maintenance.”<sup>105</sup>

As such, both because FPA needs to examine combinations of factors that are often unique to each country and because Turkey stands aside remarkably from her surroundings – both historically and geographically – and does not appear to fit any one regional or sub-regional system, this study emphasizes on a historical and country-specific rather than a theoretical and comparative approach.<sup>106</sup> As such, to solidify the analytical background and explain the domestic-international nexus, empirical evidence can be captured in the framework of a new theoretical strand that combines different disciplines.<sup>107</sup>

Here, History, and mainly Historical Institutionalism (HI), is integrated into the light of its stress on “the type of processes that often characterize international relations, including the legacies of founding moments in shaping long-term power relations and whether new ideas become consequential, the ubiquity of unintended consequences, and especially the prevalence of incremental reform over stasis and fundamental transformations.”<sup>108</sup> Indeed, “the substantive profile of HI is characterized by attention to large questions with an explicit temporal scope that concern the creation, reproduction, development, and structure of institutions over time.”<sup>109</sup> For instance, it questions issues such as the role played by ideas and material forces, the relationship between interests and institutions, and the mechanisms foregrounded in accounting for varied patterns of institutional development. Therefore, what makes this approach fit into the project's scope is that “unlike IR's earlier engagement with history, historical institutionalism is less about drawing lessons from or

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<sup>104</sup> Tziarras, 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Palmer, G., & Morgan, T. C. (2007). Power transition, the two-good theory, and neorealism: A comparison with comments on recent US foreign policy. *International interactions*, 33(3), 329-346; Hatipoglu & Palmer, 201.,

<sup>106</sup> Aydın, 1994.

<sup>107</sup> Elman, & Elman, 2001.

<sup>108</sup> Fioretos, O. (2011). Historical institutionalism in international relations. *International Organization*, 65(2), 367-399.

<sup>109</sup> Pierson, P., & Skocpol, T. (2002). Historical institutionalism in contemporary political science. *Political science: The state of the discipline*, 3(1), 1-32.

documenting the past than it is about identifying the conditions under which and the mechanisms by which the past affects the present and the future.”<sup>110</sup>

Historical Institutionalism makes visible and understandable the overarching contexts and interacting processes that shape and reshape states, politics, and public policymaking, i.e., the intersection of domestic and international politics.<sup>111</sup> This approach also bridges divides within political science, including the gulf that sometimes separates normative theorists from empirical researchers. Such an analysis allows us to examine the relationship between political actors as objects and as “agents of history” where, although the institutions can shape and constrain political strategies in important ways, they are themselves also the outcomes (conscious or unintended) of a deliberate political strategy of political conflict and choice.<sup>112</sup>

Adopting this flexible approach also permits the development of a more dynamic study of policy change and the concentration on the actions of strategic actors operating within shifting contexts by taking agency into consideration and expanding contextual instruments by focusing on incremental changes rather than only on exogenous factors.<sup>113</sup> This paves the way for FPA to take seriously history, whether understood as sequences of events or shared experiences, as an influential factor in pulling and pushing the system’s units and making specific behavioral outcomes more or less likely.<sup>114</sup> Last, this also proves helpful in incorporating ideology and culture as parameters that can be defined as “collective expectations, including inter-related beliefs, norms and assumptions that shape the strategic understanding of political leaders, societal elites and even the general public.”<sup>115</sup>

Therefore, adding historical depth to FPA and FPC aligns seamlessly with those authors emphasizing incorporating History into Foreign Policy Analysis. This not only means adopting a mere sequence of events following historical patterns (or breaks), but rather to include the study of micro-dimensions of history in which different agents (and not just systemic or measurable structural factors) play a role. This works also the other way around, in the sense that FPA can be complementary to a historical analysis. This is because, for the latter, it is crucial to reverse the conventional sequence of priorities in IR, recognizing that categorization and clustering of thought precede historical interpretation.<sup>116</sup> History thus becomes an instrumental extension of these pre-

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<sup>110</sup> Fioretos, 2011.

<sup>111</sup> Skocpol, T., & Pierson, P. (2002). “Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary Political Science.” In I. Katznelson & H. V. Milner (Eds.), *Political Science: State of the Discipline* (pp. 693–721). W.W. Norton.

<sup>112</sup> Steinmo, S., Thelen, K., & Longstreth, F. (Eds.). (1992). *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>113</sup> Bell, S. (2011). Do We Really Need a New ‘Constructivist Institutionalism’ to Explain Institutional Change? *British Journal of Political Science*, 41(4), 883–906.

<sup>114</sup> Meibauer et al., 2021.

<sup>115</sup> Idem.

<sup>116</sup> Mahoney, J. (2003). Knowledge accumulation in comparative historical research. In J. Mahoney & D. Rueschemeyer (Eds.), *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (1st ed., pp. 131–174). Cambridge University Press.



existing cognitive frameworks. Historians engage in a deductive process that operates concurrently with the meticulous reconstruction of events, identifying elements of continuity and discontinuity to unveil the deeper matrix of forces. This matrix is not pre-established but emerges dynamically through the narrative construction of history. Consequently, history is a product of methodological rigor, evolving with changing approaches rather than static knowledge of events.<sup>117</sup>

In the case of TFP, one can affirm that it is not merely an episodic change but a continuous narrative that shapes its trajectory over various periods. To comprehend this evolution, addressing a temporal gap in analyzing Turkey's dynamics becomes crucial in capturing the nuances of this historical continuity and change.

### **2.2.5. Integrating History in the Study of Foreign Policy**

Taking the timing of events, their sequence, and their location within historical chains seriously militates against analyses into which past developments are simply imported as an independent variable.<sup>118</sup>

This quote aptly resumes an ongoing trend of discussion lately, which has made its way into “forms of reconciliation” between disciplines like History, International Relations, Political Sciences, and Area Studies.<sup>119</sup> This is because the latest turn toward “eclecticism” in analyzing foreign policy matters has recognized that “identifying dramatic and incremental changes across different policy domains requires examining a longer timeframe.”<sup>120</sup> Therefore, this thesis focuses on an expanded window of time that allows for analyses within a coherent paradigm. Coherently, it uses a comprehensive definition of foreign policy change that includes changes in methods and goals, incremental and dramatic breaks with past behavior, and thorough as well as more narrow changes.<sup>121</sup>

Considering history as an explanatory factor for making foreign policy, engagement with history helps us uncover historical contingencies and better understand the vagaries of different historical contexts.<sup>122</sup> Relying on this approach, this thesis recognizes its validity in many aspects of

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<sup>117</sup> See Tilly, C. (2001). Historical Analysis of Political Processes. In J. H. Turner (Ed.), *Handbook of Sociological Theory* (pp. 567–588). Springer US.

<sup>118</sup> Pierson & Skocpol, 2002.

<sup>119</sup> Idem.

<sup>120</sup> Haesebrouck & Joly, 7.

<sup>121</sup> First, history-focused explanations can be employed to shed light both on how rules of action have changed, if foreign policy is defined as entailing rules of action, and on how actual foreign policy outputs have shifted over time. Similarly, if a process-oriented definition of FPA is adopted, historical case studies can reveal temporal variations in decision-making processes. Then, if an outcome-focused definition is employed, historical analysis reveals how foreign policy choices have varied. See Ghalehdar, 2022, 437.

<sup>122</sup> Møller & Skaaning, 2021, 104.

foreign policy. It is fair to recognize that recent critical IR's engagement with interdisciplinary time studies, historical sociology, the revival of large-scale comparative histories, the rise of HI and HIR, the use of thick descriptive case studies by constructivists, and new disciplinary intellectual histories have all emphasized the importance of time, contingency, and historical context.<sup>123</sup> However, commonly, IR scholars distinguish between “continuity” and “change” in various political processes and disciplinary subfields and treat these terms as self-evident categories of almost universal pertinence.<sup>124</sup> Many critical international studies explicitly contest the “linear time” of the state, positivism, and hegemonic history, parroting a widespread tendency to conflate historical and methodological linearity with an underlying “base time,” “essential temporality,” or “source time.”<sup>125</sup> An obvious example of this is the IR discourse of “rupture,” which claims to refute all allusions to linear time but foregrounds rupture as resources for politics otherwise of less violence and greater affirmation in the future.<sup>126</sup>

The Historical Institutional approach assesses the need to engage with history in analyzing how certain policy domains vary (or not) over time. Indeed, the latest HI scholarship is helpful for this project because it aims to explain why institutions change in time, an issue typically framed as distinct from continuity.<sup>127</sup> Historical institutionalists make important contributions in this context with their nuanced and contextual understandings of why particular unintended consequences prevail, whether anticipated or not. As such, the sequence of events merits attention not simply as a way of documenting history but because the order in which things happen can influence the interests of political actors, their ability to shape outcomes, and the overall direction of history.<sup>128</sup>

Overall, the HI framework “does not preclude opening the black box of the state in the analysis of foreign policy,” as even some flexible IR theories like NCR scholars sometimes recognize.<sup>129</sup> A clear theoretical framework distinguishes chronological accounts of events from the analysis and understanding of those events. Unlike rational choice institutionalists, who focus on the coordinating functions of institutions, historical institutionalists are interested in the temporal processes that lead to the emergence of institutions. Additionally, the order in which events occur influences how they

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<sup>123</sup> Mello & Ostermann, 2022.

<sup>124</sup> Hom, A. R. (2021). Time and History in International Relations. In B. de Carvalho, J. Costa Lopez, & H. Leira (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Among others, see a critical appraisal by Zhang, C. (2017). How to Merge Western Theories and Chinese Indigenous Theories to Study Chinese Politics? *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 22(2), 283–294.

<sup>125</sup> Chambers, S. A. (2011). Untimely politics *avant la lettre*: The temporality of social formations. *Time & Society*, 20(2), 197–223.

<sup>126</sup> Hom, A. R. (2020). *International relations and the problem of time* (First Edition). Oxford University Press, 208–231.

<sup>127</sup> Hom, 2021, 214.

<sup>128</sup> Mahoney, J., Kimball, E., & Koivu, K. L. (2009). The Logic of Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(1), 114–146.

<sup>129</sup> Juneau, T. (2020). Neoclassical Realism. In *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iran's Foreign Policy* (pp. 17–34). Stanford University Press.

happen and their outcomes, reflecting the assumption of path dependence. That said, it is worth recognizing that there are some concepts in HI and HIR that help to supplement the emergence of more flexible approaches to international politics.

First is the conceptualization of the “state” and corollary features like “nationalism and identity.” It is clear that there remains a broad consensus in IR that states are the key players in shaping the most consequential international institutions. In this sense, thorough historical analysis reveals that contractual understandings of the state and of international organizations are often not adequate to re-construct the processes of their historical formation.<sup>130</sup> This, in turn, affects the positions governments are likely to adopt in international settings. This approach promises to provide more nuanced and comprehensive explanations for why states respond differently to the same international challenges and to elucidate when they exhibit continuity in their views on the structure of international institutions. In this sense, the object of this thesis is to conceive the state under a monolithic conception no longer but to study the behavior of “those who make decisions on behalf of the state, and who become the state.”<sup>131</sup> This goes with the challenge of overcoming traditional and still pervasive state-centricity. Too often, the tendency has been to drift back into familiar realist currents and assumptions about the primacy of the state, national interest, and hard power. Julian Go, George Lawson, and Benjamin de Carvalho make similar observations about state-centricity in historical approaches. They write,

[The] point is that a dominant focus on the state has acted as an obstacle to the effective analysis not only of other units but also to how states interacted with these. What began as an analytical move became, over time, an ontological one: the state acted as a cage not just of social scientific inquiry but of social relations *in toto*. In other words, analysts acted as if states really were containers of ideas and practices. Yet there are a myriad of actors, forms, and processes operating at different scales that states try to manage, regulate, or discipline but which they ultimately cannot.<sup>132</sup>

Following a new historical institutionalist tradition opened by authors like Migdal, the state can be conceived as a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts, where practices can bolster that image of the state but they can also batter it.<sup>133</sup> This multilayered understanding is justified by a broader conceptualization of terms like “state, nationalism, and Islamism” that are too often taken for

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<sup>130</sup> Migdal, J. S. (2001). *State in society: Studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another*. Cambridge University Press; Blieseemann de Guevara, B. (Ed.). (2012). *Statebuilding and state-formation: The political sociology of intervention*. Routledge;.

<sup>131</sup> Aydın, M. .1994.

<sup>132</sup> De Carvalho et al. , 2021, 51.

<sup>133</sup> Migdal, 2001.

granted as universal and have even more peculiar characteristics in the Turkish case when compared to the rest of the Middle East.<sup>134</sup>

Second, regarding the question of whether Middle Eastern states are comparable to Western states, it is particularly necessary to stress the conceptual difference between state, regime, and government, even though the lines are usually quite blurred in practice.<sup>135</sup> In this regard, countries of the region have a special and problematic relationship with another constructed entity, the nation. Quoting Owen,

In the Middle East, as elsewhere, state formation took place during a period when local peoples were being encouraged to imagine themselves, and very often to act, as members of a variety of different possible communities, some tribal, religious or territorial, others of the pan-Arab, pan-Turkish or pan-Islamic variety. Different regimes then attempted to accommodate and to control this process in terms of the practices they developed towards frontiers, passports, systems of law and taxation, while all the time being pushed towards the establishment of one fixed and singular identity for their putative citizens.<sup>136</sup>

Indeed, the formation of a centralized state system in Turkey was characterized by several important features. Emerging from the ruins of a dynastic empire, Turkey faced challenges from constitutional and reformist groups in the early twentieth century. It was occupied by foreign troops and ultimately saw its previous regime overthrown by a new one led by military officers who had seized power in alliance with nationalist forces in the early 1920s. The state was then refashioned through the establishment of a national army, a centralized bureaucracy, and a secular legal system, largely modeled on Western European experiences. Statist development projects were imposed on society with minimal discussion or debate. Despite these common features, in Turkey, the concept of the state goes with the conflicting conceptualization of nationalism and Islamism. This is because “Turkish Islam is tied up with Turkish nationalism in a unique fashion, the product of Turkish history and identity.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> About this discussion, see Bacik, G. (2011). The Separation of Islam and Nationalism in Turkey. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 17(2), 140–160. As Roger Owen underlines, the word “state” itself has two distinct meanings in everyday usage even though the two are often conflated. One use refers to sovereign political entities, i.e., those states with international recognition, their own boundaries, their own seat at the United Nations, and their own flag. The other refers to that set of institutions and practices which combines administrative, judicial, rule-making and coercive powers. While the use of the word in the first sense is absolutely clear and can be used in a Middle Eastern context to refer directly to the Arab states, Israel, Turkey, and Iran, that of the second is more problematic and requires further elaboration. See Owen, R. (2004). *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (3rd edition). Routledge, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Owen, 2004, 3.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 4. This process was typically facilitated by the creation of what Zubaida has termed a “national political field.”<sup>136</sup> After independence, this field became the focal point for all significant political activities. Enclosed by new international boundaries, it served to inhibit cross-border relationships and redirect local power or interests towards the capital city, where the most crucial political battles were now contested and decided. This is in line with the creation of the Turkish state. See Zubaida, 2004, 124-26.

<sup>137</sup> In the words of Zubaida, “Turkish Islamism is national and often nationalist in nature. See Zubaida, S. (1996). Turkish Islam and National Identity. *Middle East Report*, 199, 12.

Ultimately, these features help explain how “the political field works in Turkey.” A crucial feature of the Turkish political system is its pluralism, where political parties alternate in government through elections, with even Islamist parties having become fully integrated into this system. This integration may explain the relative marginality of violent Islamist groups in Turkey compared to the vigorous armed opposition in the Middle East. The real electoral contests in Turkey led parties to seek broad constituencies of support, often based on clientelist, communal, and regional networks.<sup>138</sup> In many regions of Turkey, these constituencies are socially conservative and religious. Consequently, mainstream center-right parties, such as the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, DYP) and the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP), have always included significant Islamist elements, including deputies in Parliament.<sup>139</sup> During the 1980s, the relatively permissive atmosphere of the Özal era allowed these Islamist elements to become more open and active. His liberal reforms included a relaxation of the state’s Kemalist and secularist stances, acknowledging Islam as an essential component of Turkish identity. Secular parties also include Islamist elements somehow. Their leaders often assert their secular credentials and loyalty to Kemalist principles. In practical terms, this implies that Turkish leaders face the additional constraint of a powerful and vocal public opinion – either secularist or Islamist – at home.<sup>140</sup>

A second element to analyze is the long-standing debate about the agent-structure dilemma. Against this backdrop, what differentiates this HI(R) turn from more classical IR constructivist approaches is the concept that “ideas do not come about in a vacuum, but they are embedded in a historical context and need institutional support to be effective.”<sup>141</sup> This allows us to adopt a more flexible stance that considers agents and institutions to shape each other dialectically. The flexible version of HI refuses the type of institutional analysis, which places too much explanatory weight on the agency. Adopting a hybrid approach to the relationship between institutions and agents ensures the development of this kind of dialectical framework as well.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> See Mardin, Ş., & Nursi, S. (1989). *Religion and social change in modern Turkey: The case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*. State Univ. of New York Press.

<sup>139</sup> These actors and dynamics will be deeply examined later.

<sup>140</sup> Zubaida, 1996, 10.

<sup>141</sup> Guzzini, S. (2000). A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 6(2), 147–182.

<sup>142</sup> As Thelen and Steinmo state, “Institutional analysis (...) allows us to examine the relationship between political actors as objects and agents of history. The institutions that are at the center of historical institutionalist analysis (...) can shape and constrain political strategies in important ways, but they are themselves also the outcomes (conscious or unintended) of deliberate political strategies of political conflict and of choice.” See Steinmo, S., Thelen, K., & Longstreth, F. (Eds.). (1992). *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press, 10.

By following this argument, Bell points out that researchers should unearth the institutional black box and concentrate on the actions of strategic actors operating within shifting contexts.<sup>143</sup> In light of these critics in mind, a flexible version of HI(R) developed a more dynamic study of policy change.<sup>144</sup> This allows us to overcome the fact that

As long as the agency-structure issue remains unresolved, the foreign policy analyst is unable to address a crucial aspect of empirical reality itself; that the policies of states are a consequence of, and can hence only be fully explained with reference to, a dynamic process in which both agents and structures causally condition each other over time.<sup>145</sup>

Accordingly, Hill emphasizes that the implementation process of foreign policy decisions is as crucial as the decision-making phase. He argues that foreign policy activities cannot be fully understood by focusing solely on the decision-making stage, as the outcomes of foreign policy decisions often differ from the original goals.<sup>146</sup> Additionally, the individual actor (the agent itself) is also considered a part of the agency. Given the complexity of foreign policy machinery, numerous individual actors are involved in the process, but the most significant are those with more power and influence. In other words, the decision-makers and those with a substantial share in foreign policy choices are considered individual agents. In this context, presidents, Prime Ministers, ministers of foreign affairs, and advisors on foreign policy issues are key components of analysis at the individual level.

In line with this understanding, by including agency and expanding contextual instruments by focusing on incremental changes rather than focusing only on exogenous factors, a historical approach helps go beyond mere present patterns.<sup>147</sup> This implies delving into the continuous interplay between past and future behavior within the evolving historical context. As such, the adaptability of foreign policy decision-makers, especially within shifting historical dynamics, becomes a focal point. Here, we witness the intricate pendulum between past experiences and future responses, illuminating the adaptive nature of Turkish leaders as they navigate the international arena. Second, foreign policy change can also be seen as a “*learning process*” in the sense that “drawing inferences from historical encounters and engagements contribute to an ongoing learning process that shapes the nation's foreign policy trajectory.”<sup>148</sup> This stresses how a change of beliefs or the development of new beliefs, skills, or procedures due to the observation and interpretation of experience allows states and political agents

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<sup>143</sup> Bell, S. (2011). Do We Really Need a New „Constructivist Institutionalism“ to Explain Institutional Change? *British Journal of Political Science*, 41(4), 883-906.

<sup>144</sup> Idem. For a discussion, see also Hill, C. (2003). *The changing politics of foreign policy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>145</sup> Carlsnaes, 1992, 256.

<sup>146</sup> Hill, 2003.

<sup>147</sup> Morin, J.-F., & Paquin, J. (2018). *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox*. Springer International Publishing, 48.

<sup>148</sup> Moravcsik, 1997.

to draw inferences from the past and act upon them in the future.<sup>149</sup> It also highlights not only the historical depth but also the dynamic nature of how leaders navigate the international arena, learning and adapting over time.<sup>150</sup>

In addition, for what concerns both the domestic and the individual level, it is important to include what Klymenko and Siddi define as “*collective memory*,” the shared memories held by a community about the past, a subjective image of the past constructed by political actors in the present based on a community’s current social and historical necessities.<sup>151</sup> For politicians and the public, historical reconstruction is no longer about “how it really was” but about the instrumental use of the past to make moral claims and prompt political actions.<sup>152</sup>

Finally, within the framework of HI, an original approach allows us to embrace a more dynamic study of policy change that underscores the value of history as an “explanatory factor.” As Rixen and Viola articulated, this helps explain how past decisions, made at critical junctures, influence present actions through positive feedback loops and path dependencies. This also covers the dynamics of change and continuity.<sup>153</sup> Accordingly, drawing from HI proves instrumental in identifying the conditions and mechanisms through which the past influences the present and future. It shifts the focus from merely documenting historical events to understanding the overarching contexts and interacting processes that shape and reshape states, politics, and public policymaking.<sup>154</sup> At a deeper and more general level, the motivating concern of HI and HIR is “to understand the processes by which institutions change or do not change”<sup>155</sup>. Applied to the realm of foreign policy, historical institutionalism accounts for how past decisions influence today’s foreign policy.

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<sup>149</sup> Mello & Ostermann, 2022, 441.

<sup>150</sup> Glencross, A. (2015). From ‘doing history’ to thinking historically: Historical consciousness across History and International Relations. *International Relations*, 29(4), 413-433.

<sup>151</sup> Klymenko, L., & Siddi, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Historical memory and foreign policy*. Palgrave Macmillan. They also argue that thanks to their discursive power and access to the media, political leaders are particularly well-positioned to shape collective memories and adapt them to the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. See Klymenko, L., & Siddi, M. (2020). Exploring the link between historical memory and foreign policy: An introduction. *International Politics*, 57(6), 945–953.

<sup>152</sup> Idem. In a similar vein, others introduce the concept of “securitization of historical memory.” Accordingly, discursive securitization is often inherent in memory politics because political actors tend to depict denial and the fading of collective memory as existential threats. See Mälksoo, M. (2023). Politics of memory: A conceptual introduction. In M. Mälksoo (Ed.), *Handbook on the Politics of Memory* (pp. 1–16). Edward Elgar Publishing.

<sup>153</sup> Rixen, T., Viola, L. A., & Zürn, M. (2016). *Historical institutionalism and international relations: Explaining institutional development in world politics*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>154</sup> Capoccia, G., & Kelemen, R. D. (2007). The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism. *World Politics*, 59(3), 341–369; Pierson, P. (2004). *Politics in time: History, institutions, and social analysis*. Princeton Univ. Press.

<sup>155</sup> Rixen & Viola 2016, 10.

## 2.3. Levels of Analysis

The concept of the level of analysis in IR problematizes the selection and restriction of specific components for analysis. Wight explains that the unit of analysis refers to the object of inquiry, while the level of analysis pertains to how the aspect of the object is explained.<sup>156</sup> It is a distinction between what we want to explain (the unit) and how we explain it (the level): the explanandum and the explanans. Buzan adds that the level of analysis problem involves identifying and treating various locations where the causes of observed phenomena can be discovered.<sup>157</sup> Singer<sup>158</sup> identifies the foreign policy behavior of states as the unit of analysis, proposing two levels to explain this unit: the international system and the national state. He describes the systemic level as the most comprehensive, capable of encompassing the entire web of interactions within the system and its environment. According to Singer, this level allows examination of “the forms of interaction in the system, the processes and conditions of coalitions and power configurations, alterations and their influences on political institutions, and rules and standards imposed in the social milieu.” However, he was seminal in adding the importance of the national state level, where researchers can observe different patterns among actors, allowing for a detailed examination of goals, motivations, and national policy purposes, which is not possible at the systemic level. For him, this level necessitates analyzing the conditions under which goals are set, the decision-making processes, and the domestic and external influences affecting these processes. Singer claims that the national state level “encourages the observer to examine the actors in a detailed fashion, which the systemic level would never allow, looking at goals, motivations, and purposes in national policy.”<sup>159</sup> Similarly, Moul concurs that shifting between levels should not occur during a study but emphasizes that such shifts are necessary to assess the relative weights of systemic (external) and domestic (internal) variables.<sup>160</sup> This approach aims to achieve a better theoretical account of specific factors in a state’s foreign policy behavior. Accordingly, “in each model of state behavior, when one variable is treated as the most important, the others are underestimated.”<sup>161</sup> While one might suggest that Singer implicitly introduces a third level of analysis, focusing on individuals participating in policy-making processes, Isaak criticizes his approach for reifying groups of people into “objective” nation-states or a single

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<sup>156</sup> Wight, C. (2007). Inside the epistemological cave all bets are off. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 10(1), 40–56. See also his engagement with history in Wight, C. (2009). Theorising Terrorism: The State, Structure and History. *International Relations*, 23(1), 99–106.

<sup>157</sup> Singer, 1961.

<sup>158</sup> Idem.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>160</sup> Moul, W. B. (1973). The level of analysis problem revisited. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, 6(3), 494–513.

<sup>161</sup> Singer, 196, 290.



international system, arguing that this depersonalization reflects an imperialistic consciousness.<sup>162</sup> Isaak advocates for a humanistic science of international politics that analyzes the tensions between human needs and social facts.<sup>163</sup>

Building on this premise, Hollis and Smith<sup>164</sup> propose four levels of explanation in international relations theory: international system, nation-state, bureaucracy, and individual. They argue that these levels can be grouped into system-unit (state), state-bureaucracy, and bureaucracy-individual, with each containing its system (structure) and unit (agency). They emphasize the need to clarify whether processes run from system to unit (top-down) or vice versa (bottom-up). Not very differently, Buzan asserts that levels of analysis serve as ontological referents rather than sources of explanation. He identifies three primary ideas for understanding levels: interaction capacity, structure, and process. Interaction capacity involves transportation, communication, and organizational capability; structure refers to the arrangement of units within a system; and process examines how units interact within the constraints of interaction capacity and structure, focusing on durable or recurrent patterns. As Buzan explains, levels can be understood as “different types or sources of explanation for observed phenomena. In principle, anything that can be established as a distinct source of explanation can qualify.”<sup>165</sup>

What is evident from this discussion is that different scholars propose various levels of analysis. Although the number and names of levels differ from scholar to scholar, the common point of agreement is that system, state, and individual levels are the main levels in the analysis, but in which other parameters can be added. This prompted a new strand that builds on early pioneering work seeking to capture and analyze international politics by overcoming archetypical theoretical rigidities. Snyder first identified the point of theoretical intersection between material and ideational factors, focusing not on the *state* but rather on the *human decision-maker* and prioritizing the study of the *decision-making process* rather than the *foreign policy output per se*.<sup>166</sup> This focus was further studied in subsequent research, such as Rosenau’s “linkage politics”<sup>167</sup> and Putnam’s “two-level game.”<sup>168</sup> However, as also demonstrated in the literature review above, the external dimension remains understudied in these FPC models. Therefore, this project’s approach still refers to two central theoretical strands, namely NCR and the multilevel approach elaborated by Hinnebusch and

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<sup>162</sup> Isaak, R. A. (1974). The individual in international politics: Solving the level-of-analysis problem. *Polity*, 7(2), 264-276.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 276

<sup>164</sup> Hollis, M., & Smith, S. (1991). Beware of gurus: structure and action in international relations. *Review of International Studies*, 17(4), 393-410.

<sup>165</sup> Buzan, B. (1995). The Present as a Historic Turning Point. *Journal of Peace Research*, 32(4), 385.

<sup>166</sup> Hudson, 2005.

<sup>167</sup> Rosenau, J. N. (1969). Intervention as a scientific concept. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 13(2), 149-171.

<sup>168</sup> Putnam, 1988.

Ehteshami.<sup>169</sup> What follows is an overview of these two approaches to anticipate how they can be integrated into the FPA-based framework of the present research.

As Altunışık and Martin recognize<sup>170</sup>, this approach contributes to the FPC literature in two ways. First, it demonstrates the importance of global systemic changes and, equally, if not more important, regional systemic changes in explaining FPC, especially for a middle power such as Turkey. Secondly, at the same time, this model shows that there is no *a priori* hierarchy between the three levels of analysis. In other words, it does not prioritize the international systemic level as does Neoclassical Realism but equalizes the importance of each parameter in its contribution to change. In parallel, this leaves room for expanding the timeframe of the research and, therefore, adopting a deeper historical outlook in the process of construction and deconstruction of the events, structures, and agents concerning TFP in a more critical way.<sup>171</sup> This justifies why this research de-hierarchizes the “traditional” levels of analysis to appreciate that political events do not happen in a vacuum. Instead, it takes place in a social and cultural context that historically characterizes a specific milieu but that can also be shaped and re-shaped according to external and internal alterations (Table 1).<sup>172</sup>

### 2.3.1. The External Level

Although the divergences between IR and FPA are clear regarding the prominence of systemic factors, the latter has lately developed a new framework to ease the net distinction between external and internal dimensions of foreign policy. In this sense, the model elaborated by Haesebrouck and Joly is based on the assumption that “given that foreign policy is explicitly directed toward foreign entities, many of the drivers and inhibitors of foreign policy change are located outside the boundaries of the jurisdiction of foreign policy decisionmakers.”<sup>173</sup> First, it asserts that foreign policy change can be expected to be influenced by systemic conditions<sup>174</sup>, therefore accepting some neorealist pillars. Indeed, as suggested by neorealist theories, part of the FPA scholarship admits that systemic factors constrain the foreign policy options of states. Volgy and Schwarz, for example, argue that bipolar systems will restrict states’ flexibility to change their foreign policy, while conditions of multipolarity

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<sup>169</sup> Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2014.

<sup>170</sup> Altunışık, & Martin, 2023.

<sup>171</sup> See sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.2.

<sup>172</sup> Idem.

<sup>173</sup> Joly & Haesebrouck, 2021, 21.

<sup>174</sup> Gustavsson, 1999; Rosati, J. A., Hagan, J. D., & Sampson, M. W. (1994). *Foreign policy restructuring: How governments respond to global change*. University of South Carolina press.

enhance this flexibility.<sup>175</sup> Systemic changes, in turn, can lead to a “re-conceptualization of security threats and challenges, a re-prioritization of foreign policy objectives, and the emergence of new means of actions and foreign policy options.”<sup>176</sup> Moreover, states' position within the global system can also impact foreign policy change. States that are satisfied with the *status quo* are less likely to start significant changes in their foreign policy.<sup>177</sup> Skidmore argues that powerful states will be less responsive to international change than mid-level powers because the former can more easily manage the costs of resisting external incentives for change.<sup>178</sup> This view also expects middle powers and small states to have a strong incentive to adjust to international changes quickly. However, they are also expected to lack the capacity and will to fully adjust their foreign policies. Brazys et al.<sup>179</sup> indicate that international norms can be the primary reason for foreign policy change or instrumentalized by domestic political actors wanting to change their countries' foreign policy.

Next to these more structural conditions, this FPA scholarship embraces a historical view and stresses the importance of international events as major potential drivers of foreign policy change. For instance, Hermann expects most foreign policy changes to result from some change or initiative in the external environment of states.<sup>180</sup> An essential source of foreign policy change is external shocks, which are “large events in terms of visibility and immediate impact on the recipient.”<sup>181</sup> Lee suggests that dramatic foreign policy changes generally occur under crisis-led (or policy failure-led) uncertainty.<sup>182</sup> Welch argues that foreign policy change is most likely when a policy fails its objectives either repeatedly or catastrophically or when leaders become convinced it will fail in the near future,<sup>183</sup> such that policy failures may incentivize decision-makers to consider alternative policy options.<sup>184</sup>

Likewise, Blavoukos and Bourantonis<sup>185</sup> argue that foreign policy changes might result from state interactions. Such interactions can conflict and consequently create crises, opening windows of

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<sup>175</sup> Volgy, T. J., & Schwarz, J. E. (1994). Foreign Policy Restructuring and the Myriad Webs of Restraint. In Rosati, J. A., Hagan, J. D., & Sampson, M. W. (1994). *Foreign policy restructuring: How governments respond to global change*. University of South Carolina press, 31.

<sup>176</sup> Blavoukos, & Bourantonis, 2014, 488. See also Rynhold, J. (2007). Cultural Shift and Foreign Policy Change: Israel and the Making of the Oslo Accords. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42(4), 424.

<sup>177</sup> Volgy & Schwarz, 1994, 32.

<sup>178</sup> In the same book, see Skidmore, D. (1994). Explaining State Responses to International Change: The Structural Sources of Foreign Policy Rigidity and Change, 50.

<sup>179</sup> Brazys, S., Kaarbo, J., & Panke, D. (2017). Foreign policy change and international norms: A conceptual framework. *International Politics*, 54(6), 659–668.

<sup>180</sup> Herman, 1990.

<sup>181</sup> Hermann, 1990, 12.

<sup>182</sup> Lee, Y. W. (2012). Synthesis and reformulation of foreign policy change: Japan and East Asian financial regionalism. *Review of International Studies*, 38(4), 789.

<sup>183</sup> Welch, D. (2005). Painful choices: A theory of foreign policy change. Princeton Univ. Press.

<sup>184</sup> Walsh, J. I. (2006). Policy Failure and Policy Change: British Security Policy After the Cold War. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4), 492–93.

<sup>185</sup> Blavoukos, & Bourantonis, 2014, 489.

opportunity for foreign policy change. Firstly, states interact within the system with “friends and foes” and are susceptible to changes in their course of foreign policy action. Domestic upheavals that bring about radical foreign policy shifts in one country impose a differentiated response by the other countries with an interest in the region. States’ conflicting interactions may generate crisis conditions and open an “opportunity window” for foreign policy change.<sup>186</sup> If such crises highlight the inappropriateness of past policies in dealing with new international developments, they may trigger a re-evaluation of current policies and practices that may lead to foreign policy change.<sup>187</sup> Secondly, within the framework of international interactions, states may aspire to membership in an international organization (IO), closer engagement with other states, or integration in the international system more generally. Potential strengthening of relations is usually offered through positive (economic and political incentives – “carrots”) or negative (sanctions – “sticks”) forms of conditionality policy, imposing changes in the foreign policy of the candidate state.<sup>188</sup> Thirdly, participation in IOs may activate foreign policy changes through socialization processes. Assuming an IO has a distinctive normative and cultural basis, membership in it entails, if not an a priori, adherence to its norms and values, at least their gradual internalization. The level of institutional embeddedness in an IO (membership continuity and commitment) and the depth and scope of interaction constitute essential parameters that determine the pace of the social learning process and may eventually lead to foreign policy re-direction.

### ***2.3.1.1. Advantages and Limitations of Other Third-Way Approaches***

In sum, it is evident that FPA theories recognize how international structural parameters refer to and emanate from the state’s participation in the global system. They identify two potential origins of foreign policy change, the first related to the state’s interaction with the system and the second one with developments in the structural features of the system per se. Starting from the latter, very much like (neo)realist theorists have argued, systemic factors delimit and constrain foreign and security policy.<sup>189</sup> Systemic changes may lead to a re-conceptualization of security threats and challenges, a

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<sup>186</sup> Boin, A., 'T Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005). *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press; Keeler, J. T. S. (1993). Opening the Window for Reform: Mandates, Crises, and Extraordinary Policy-Making. *Comparative Political Studies*, 25(4), 433–486.

<sup>187</sup> Walsh 2006.

<sup>188</sup> Mertens, C. (2024). Carrots as Sticks: How Effective Are Foreign Aid Suspensions and Economic Sanctions? *International Studies Quarterly*, 68(2).

<sup>189</sup> Ripsman, N. M., Taliaferro, J. W., & Lobell, S. E. (2016). *Neoclassical realist theory of international politics*. Oxford University Press.

re-prioritization of foreign policy objectives, and the emergence of new means of action and foreign policy options. Therefore, even though this research seeks to depart from any debate related to IR scholarship, justifying how its theoretical framework has been built requires going gradually through the main logical and conceptual passages. Therefore, this section aims to explain that whereas Neoclassical Realism represents a valid “third way” to study TFP through different levels, it still represents a hierarchical approach to foreign policy theories. While NCR and complex realist assumptions regarding the importance of considering the systemic level are helpful to understanding a state’s foreign policy behavior, this thesis expands and clarifies the conceptualization of this level by breaking it into two sub-levels, namely international and regional, and recognizes the importance of the role of agents within the structure.

In a nutshell, Neoclassical Realism “builds upon the complex state-society relationship found in classical realism without sacrificing the central insight of neorealism about the constraints of the international system.”<sup>190</sup> Basically, NCR remains a structural realist theory of international relations that prioritizes and stresses power, interests, and coalition-making as the central elements in a theory of politics but seeks to recapture classical realists and historical analysis’s appreciation that it is necessary to “look within societies as well as between them, to deny that states are simple, irreducible atoms whose power and interests are to be assessed.”<sup>191</sup> Thus, the NCR position takes that admission further, arguing that variables at the unit level – in the forms of ideas and perceptions of actors within the state – play a pivotal role in the selection of a particular strategy.<sup>192</sup> In contrast to (much of) neorealism, NCR explicitly analyses the translation of external stimuli into state behavior.<sup>193</sup> Characterized by an “outside-in” approach to the analysis of state behavior and international politics<sup>194</sup>, it tries “to explain variations of foreign policy over time and space” by supplementing neorealism with unit-level variables that mediate the impact of systemic stimuli.<sup>195</sup> At its basis, there is a less strict understanding of the constraints systemic conditions impose on state behavior, where states are thus assumed to have “considerable latitude” in defining their interests because structure “merely sets parameters” for state behavior.<sup>196</sup>

However, the core principles of neorealism on state, relative power, and the primacy of the anarchical material structure are primarily shared by neoclassical realists. The overall argument is

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<sup>190</sup> Ripsman et al., 2016.

<sup>191</sup> Snyder, J. L. (1994). *Myths of empire: Domestic politics and international ambition* (2. print). Cornell Univ. Press, 19.

<sup>192</sup> Rosecrance, R., Stein, A. A., & Cesa, M. (1994). The domestic bases of grand strategy. *Political Studies*, XLII(4), 718–719.

<sup>193</sup> Waltz, K. N. (2010). *Theory of international politics* (Reiss). Waveland Press.

<sup>194</sup> Götz, E. (2021). Neoclassical realist theories, intervening variables, and paradigmatic boundaries. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(2); Brian Rathbun, ‘A Rose by Any Other Name’, *Security Studies*, 17, 294–321; Meibauer, et al. 2021.

<sup>195</sup> Wivel, A. (2005). Explaining why state X made a certain move last Tuesday: the promise and limitations of realist foreign policy analysis. *Journal of international relations and development*, 8(4), 355-380.

<sup>196</sup> Ripsman et al., 2016.

that systemic factors are the most important to explain international developments over time.<sup>197</sup> In other words, this approach maintains that relative power – resources and capabilities – of the state is the main causal variable of state actions. Indeed, as defined by its most famous authors, the declared objective of NCR is to “explain political phenomena ranging from short-term crisis decision-making, foreign policy behavior, and patterns of grand strategic adjustment of individual states, to systemic outcomes, and ultimately to the evolution of the structure of the international system itself.”<sup>198</sup>

Neoclassical realists agree with structural realists that states construct their foreign security policies primarily with an eye to the threats and opportunities that arise in the international system, which shape each state’s range of policy options.<sup>199</sup> Nonetheless, what aligns with this research is that NCR rejects the implication that states necessarily respond as fluidly and mechanically to changing international circumstances as structural realist balance-of-power theories imply. This approach considers systemic conditions neither obvious nor specific enough to guide decision-makers to only one possible course of action.<sup>200</sup>

First, state leaders do not always perceive systemic stimuli correctly.<sup>201</sup> Leaders, “who are only human after all, frequently err in how they process information, their calculations of relative power, their identification of the options at their disposal, and their assessments of the likely consequences of their actions.”<sup>202</sup> The second limitation of the structural realist model is that the international system does not always present clear signals about threats and opportunities.<sup>203</sup> If the international system only rarely provides clear enough information to states to guide their policy responses, then a broad range of foreign policy choices and international political outcomes must lie outside the purview of a structural theory of international politics. Third, neoclassical realists note that leaders do not always respond rationally to systemic stimuli.<sup>204</sup> As a result, leaders may fail to identify the entire range of policy alternatives available to them or may choose between them in a suboptimal manner rather than selecting the option likely to maximize the expected payoff at the lowest possible cost. Finally, structural realism assumes that states are functionally similar in that they all perform the same core functions (maintaining basic levels of law and order and external defense) and that they act as unitary rational actors, responding optimally to systemic pressures in a

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<sup>197</sup> Idem.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 19. See also Sterling-Folker, J. (1997). Realist Environment, Liberal Process, and Domestic-Level Variables. *International Studies Quarterly*, 41(1), 1–26.

<sup>200</sup> Rose, 1998.

<sup>201</sup> Ripsman et al., 2016, 20.

<sup>202</sup> Jervis, R. (2017). *Perception and misperception in international politics* (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press; Stoessinger, J. G. (2005). *Why nations go to war* (9th ed). Thomson/Wadsworth.

<sup>203</sup> Ripsman et al., 2016.

<sup>204</sup> Holsti, O. R. (2022). Theories of Crisis Decision-Making. In P. G. Lauren (Ed.), *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*. Brill.

fluid manner. These assumptions ignore that “because of domestic political/economic circumstances, states cannot always extract or mobilize the domestic resources required to respond efficiently to systemic imperatives.”<sup>205</sup> In practical terms, however, not all states can direct policy independently when faced opposition from powerful domestic interest groups and societal veto players in the legislature and elsewhere.<sup>206</sup>

With specific reference to Turkey, only rare pioneer works have recently assumed the efficacy of drawing into NCR’s dualist interpretation, where outputs are conceived not only as results of trade-offs between domestic and international constraints but also as a reflection of shifting variables at the intrastate level.<sup>207</sup> Thus, NCR helps us to reveal the ideational context of each foreign policy issue without disregarding systemic imperatives. Emphasizing the role of both systemic incentives and intervening unit-level variables, it provides insight for examining the influence of domestic intervening variables – such as the state structure, state-society relations, and elites’ perceptions on Turkey’s relative power – and their immediate responses/foreign policy behaviors to systemic pressures through the lens of an ideational context in which these intervening variables operate.<sup>208</sup> Essentially, the notion is that “the object is a question of what foreign policy decision-makers are thinking and doing.”<sup>209</sup> In this regard, NCR not only provides an explanatory insight into states’ short-term foreign policy behaviors but also unveils the “transmission belt linking material capabilities to foreign policy behavior.”<sup>210</sup> the policy tools adopted to pursue its strategic interests along various intervening variables like national role conception, decision-making model, orientation towards the regional order, perception of the strategic environment.<sup>211</sup>

In a similar vein in studying the foreign policy of Middle Eastern actors, scholars have proposed nuanced approaches analogous to NCR as an integrative mid-ground to expose how “foreign policy can be made for domestic reasons, just as domestic policy can be made for foreign

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<sup>205</sup> Christensen, T. J. (1997). *Useful adversaries: Grand strategy, domestic mobilization, and Sino-American conflict, 1947 - 1958*. Princeton Univ. Press.

<sup>206</sup> Zakaria, F. (1999). *From wealth to power: The unusual origins of America’s world role*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>207</sup> Donelli, F. (2020). Explaining the Role of Intervening Variables in Turkey's Foreign Policy Behaviour. *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, 6(2), 223-257.

<sup>208</sup> Wohlforth, W. C. (2012). Realism and foreign policy. In S. Smith, A. Hadfield, & T. Dunne (Eds.), *Foreign policy: Theories, actors, cases* (2. ed). Oxford University Press.

<sup>209</sup> Carlsnaes, 2008. See also Ovali, A. Ş., & Özdikmenli, İ. (2019). Ideologies and the Western question in Turkish foreign policy: A neo-classical realist perspective. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 9(1), 105-126.

<sup>210</sup> Rose., 1998. See also Smith, S., Hadfield, A. & Dunne, T. (eds) 2012, *Foreign Policy: theories, actors, cases*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<sup>211</sup>

policy reasons.”<sup>212</sup> Among all, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami<sup>213</sup> have supplemented realist approaches to understanding international politics in the Middle East with the so-called theory of “complex realism.” To put it simply, although they start with “realist basics because Middle Eastern policymakers are quintessential realists, preoccupied with the threats that are so pervasive in the region,” they stress how pure realist assumptions are problematic in the sense that they do not assess the peculiarities of the system in relation to a level that is parallel to the international environment, namely the peculiarities of the area. First, they highlight that states are not necessarily cohesive actors. Second, some are so fragmented, or their sovereignty is so compromised by dependency, that their foreign policies might reflect regime interests but less obviously national interests. Third, the environment in which foreign policymakers operate is more multilayered than that depicted by realists. Fourth, aside from the regional interstate system, foreign policies are also affected by the “trans-state identities” and the global hierarchy in which regional states are embedded.

An important concept is the definition of the Middle East as a “*penetrated system*,” one subject to an exceptional level of external, chiefly Western, intervention and control but that, as in the case of post-imperial states like Turkey and Iran, is stubbornly resistant to subordination due to its cultural distinctiveness.<sup>214</sup> In other words, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami assume that states embedded in the Middle Eastern order are at odds with each other and are immersed in insecurity. Therefore, they sought external support, patronage, and resources for their regional power struggle to face the fragmentation of the regional balance of power. Especially as in the case of Turkey, where the new states emerged after significant historical systemic changes (like wars, revolutions, or drastic shifts in borders), they have remained dependent on their security on the Western global powers long after formal independence.

Another important suggestion is adopting *state-formation* approaches that can help us understand the considerable differences in state responses to what they call “the core-periphery hierarchy.” This suggests that while some regional states seek to overthrow the system established or controlled by other external powers in the region and others accept it, all regional states put some value on sovereignty and hence seek either to evade core constraints or to manipulate the core-periphery system, in what Ayoob called “subaltern realism.”<sup>215</sup> However, the post-Cold War

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<sup>212</sup> This does not necessarily mean defining Turkey as only or fully a Middle Eastern actor, but rather just simply referring to how both IR and Area Studies usually insert the country into this regional dynamics while at the same time recognizing its peculiar character. For a discussion, see Darwich, M., & Kaarbo, J. (2020). IR in the Middle East: foreign policy analysis in theoretical approaches. *International Relations*, 34(2), 225-245.

<sup>213</sup> Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2014.

<sup>214</sup> According to Brown, L. C. (1984). *International politics and the Middle East: Old rules, dangerous game*. Princeton University Press, 3-5.

<sup>215</sup> Ayoob, M. (2002). Inequality and theorizing in international relations: The case for subaltern realism. *International Studies Review*, 4(3), 27-48



transformation of the world system, marked by the Soviet collapse and unchallenged US hegemony, significantly limited regional states' abilities to defend their autonomy, reinforcing the hierarchical asymmetries of the core-periphery system. Yet, the increased external influence led to notable local resistance, mainly seen in the rise of radical political Islam, leaving local elites caught between external pressures and the demands of their populations. The cautious involvement of other great powers, such as China, in the region from the early 2000s onwards provided local states with slightly more leverage in their dealings with the United States.

Additionally, the new rivalries among Washington, Moscow, and various regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) following the Arab Uprisings indicated a shift towards regional multipolarity. Concurrently, the US's pursuit of regional hegemony appeared to wane, highlighted by its withdrawal from Iraq and its inability to manage the ensuing crises. Consequently, the way in which regions' position in the world system influences local foreign policies is complex. When the interests of local regimes align with those of dominant patron states, these regimes tend to align with their global patrons to counter local threats. Conversely, global penetration often incites resistance, prompting nationalist movements in power to form regional coalitions to balance against external forces. However, this is only possible when, simultaneously, the great powers are divided (as in the Cold War), and hegemonic intervention is thus deterred, and when the region is relatively united (like at the peak of pan-Arabism's appeal) against the outside world. In this sense, Turkey stands out as an interesting case. For instance, while it was easier for Ankara to conceptualize and prove its geostrategic role during the strict bipolar Cold War order, the decline of the USSR threat led Turkish policymakers to debate whether a new external environment represented more of a challenge or an opportunity. At the same time, being a non-Arab country in the region has traditionally been a source of identity dilemmas. Certainly, it helped Turkish politicians shape the narrative of "exceptionalism" for both domestic and foreign policy purposes. Yet, this exceptionalism has frequently asked Turkey to adapt its posture to regional and systemic changes without alienating its foundational identities.<sup>216</sup> Looking at the regional system, another main contribution of complex realism is the reference to "*identity and trans-state politics*." The starting assumption is that the high level of incongruence between states and identity immensely complicates foreign policy-making in the MENA region. While realism assumes the congruence of national identity and the state (thus nation-states) and hence imagines states as cohesive units whose policymakers pursue the "national interest," no such national interest can be assumed in the MENA region. As a result, states are highly

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<sup>216</sup>Yanık, L. K. (2023). The making of Turkish exceptionalism: The west, the rest and unreconciled issues from the past. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 640–657; Aydıntaşbaş, A. (2020). The Turkish Sonderweg: Erdoğan's New Turkey and its Role in the Global Order. *IPC-Mercator*.

permeable to trans-state movements, and discourse and consensus on the national interest cannot be taken for granted. First, the region suffers from “rampant irredentism” and dissatisfaction with the dichotomy between territorial borders and “imagined communities.”<sup>217</sup> States contest each other’s borders or interfere in each other’s “domestic” affairs by supporting dissident sub- or trans-state movements, a practice that can escalate into an actual military confrontation between them.<sup>218</sup> For instance, the Kurdish question of independence spreads across Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, making these states vulnerable to separatist movements but also allowing them to manipulate Kurdish dissidents against each other, like in the Iran-Iraq conflict of the 1980s and the Turkish-Syrian confrontation of 1998. Second, while the power of supra-state identity is most apparent in the Arab states – in the forms of pan-Arabism and pan-Islam, which share a high degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity – countries like Turkey have lately vocalized common identity traits like pan-Turkism but also championed themselves as the protectors of the Islamic Ummah in times of regional crises. Third, the complex realist spectrum for the Middle East distinguishes the non-Arab states, whose borders resulted mainly from the indigenous agency and where “the incongruity between state and identity in those states is far less salient than in the Arab world.”<sup>219</sup> In this sense, together with Iran, Turkey had a long history as a center of empires and constructed a modern nation around its dominant ethnic-linguistic cores with considerable success.

That said, however, struggles over identity were by no means detached from the material structures in which the region was embedded. On the one hand, attempts by regional states to use supra-state identity to establish regional hegemony were chiefly aimed at challenging the region’s subordination to the global core. The failures of these efforts were mainly due to the enduring material impacts of the core’s imposition of the state system on the region, including establishing state territorial boundaries and disrupting existing economic interdependencies. With the decline of pan-Arabism, which was partly replaced by pan-Islamism, Turkey and Iran, sharing an Islamic supra-state identity with the Arab world, could also pursue regional leadership ambitions. However, the result was still unique in world politics and, as Bahgat Korany put it, ruling elites remained caught between *raison d’état* (defense of the sovereignty of their states) and *raison de la nation* (national identities or identitarian ideologies) in foreign policy making.<sup>220</sup> Another parallel layer of analysis for the regional system elaborated by Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, but also by scholars like Buzan and

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<sup>217</sup> Gause, F. G. (1992). Sovereignty, Statecraft and Stability in the Middle East. *Journal of International Affairs* (New York), 45(2), 441–469; Ayoob, M. (1995). *The Third World security predicament: State making, regional conflict, and the international system*. Rienner.

<sup>218</sup> Gause, 1992.

<sup>219</sup> Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2014, 12.

<sup>220</sup> Korany, B., & Hilāl, ‘Alī al-Dīn. (2009). *The foreign policies of Arab states: The challenge of globalization* (New revised ed). American university in Cairo press.

Wæver,<sup>221</sup> is represented by *interstate relations* in the regional security context. The strategic importance or vulnerability of a state's geographical location shapes its main threats and opportunities, and contiguity typically makes neighbors the most salient threat to most states. However, states with greater power resources (wealth, population, size, social coherence) are more likely to have activist foreign policies and may adopt an "offensive realist" pursuit of regional hegemony, including the projection of soft power from a claim to act for broader regional interests. The non-Arab states have generally enjoyed the most material assets, notably Turkey and Iran, from their size and historical coherence, and Israel, from its unique external connections. This underlines the neorealist dictum that even if leaders and domestic forces determine what a state wishes or tries to do, the system level – the balance of power – determines what it can do."<sup>222</sup>

With regard to this point, complex realism recognizes the limitation of pure realist theories for the Middle East and the importance of NCR in acknowledging that "one cannot deduce state behavior from the systemic structure, particularly given its multilayered complexity in the MENA region." Similarly, this means that states' response to external threats and opportunities varies according to internal factors, notably elite threat perceptions and the capacity of institutions to mobilize power. Variations in elite perceptions suggest that threats, far from being self-evident as realism too often assumes, are shaped by identity, which determines which states are "friends" and which are "enemies." In light of this theoretical discussion, the external level is first examined before moving to other levels employed for the analysis of TFP. Therefore, instead of relying on a monolithic definition of systemic factors, this research makes reference to a general "external level" that can be divided into other sub-categories.

### **2.3.1.2.    *International Parameters***

#### *Polarity: Restrictive or Permissive Environment*

A synthesis of the neorealist approaches discussed above would argue that the change in the distribution of power can be caused by the increase or decrease of a state's material (e.g., economic, military, demographic, natural resources) capabilities; the formation or dissolution of alliances; a state's domestic problems that render it unable to mobilize or extract its resources to project its

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<sup>221</sup> Buzan, B. (2003). Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World. In F. Söderbaum & T. M. Shaw (Eds.), *Theories of New Regionalism* (pp. 140–159). Palgrave Macmillan UK; Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>222</sup> Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2014, 19.

power.<sup>223</sup> This involves recognizing the explanatory significance of how material power is distributed among states within the international system at any given time. The nature of the system – whether unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar – profoundly influences how countries define their international orientations. The distribution of material power capabilities among states sets the boundaries for what they can realistically achieve in their foreign policies. Based on their power capacities, countries should understand how much they can pursue their foreign policy ambitions. Consequently, states with varying power capabilities define their foreign policy interests differently and respond distinctively to international stimuli. Concerns regarding territorial security, societal cohesion, and economic prosperity become more pronounced as states occupy lower positions in the power hierarchy.<sup>224</sup> In the case of Turkey, it is essential to highlight that, compared to the great powers, small and middle powers would feel the pressure of “lack of trust” and “short shadow of future” problems in anarchical international environments more acutely and deeply. The risk of entrusting their security on the good intentions and security commitments of others would be much higher for small and middle powers than for the great powers.<sup>225</sup> Another important consideration is that geographical location and the psychical attributes of countries constitute a significant share of their power capacity in material terms. In the case of small and middle powers, their geographical location is a critical force multiplier at their disposal, and they tend to use this as leverage in their relations with more powerful actors. In this context, national interests, intended as the historical foundational pillars of TFP, are defined in terms of material power capabilities.

However, in contrast to neorealist theories, this thesis does not necessarily assume that these would constitute the main prisms through which leaders would respond to external developments and conceptualize their country’s international role. Important in the analysis of Turkey’s foreign policy behavior is to consider that, compared to the great powers, lesser powers are more prone to building their foreign policies based on how restrictive or permissive the system is in a particular historical period. Confronted by these constraints, they still need to take into account the polarity of the international system. In synthesis, it is accepted that the type of polarity conditions are in the presence of either a restrictive or permissive environment. A unipolar international environment signifies the presence of a single great power within the system, with all other actors adjusting to that power’s whims, aspirations, and policies.<sup>226</sup> Under bipolarity, the ability of lesser powers to achieve their

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<sup>223</sup> Taliaferro, J. W. (2009). Neoclassical realism and resource extraction: State building for future war. In S. E. Lobell, N. M. Ripsman, & J. W. Taliaferro (Eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (1st ed., pp. 194–226). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>224</sup> See, for example, J. Goodby, J. E. (2014). The Survival Strategies of Small Nations. *Survival*, 56(5), 31–39.

<sup>225</sup> Oğuzlu & Han, 2023, 61.

<sup>226</sup> Edström, H., & Westberg, J. (2020). The defense strategies of middle powers: Competing for security, influence and status in an era of unipolar demise. *Comparative Strategy*, 39(2), 171–190.

interests would be very much informed by the dynamics of the geopolitical competition between the two most powerful countries of the system. In tight bipolar environments, lesser powers would have difficulty remaining outside the power competition between the two most powerful countries in the system because they would be exposed to pressures to choose sides. In multipolar environments, lesser powers would be more able to navigate their paths. They could juggle among many great powers, which might allow them to define their foreign policy interests more independently of external constraints. Rather than bandwagoning with one great power at the expense of others, they would be more able to follow multidimensional and multidirectional foreign policies. Middle powers, defined as global swing states, would benefit most from such power configurations. If the international system were based on loose multipolarity, it could/would even be possible that some middle powers might eventually claim to elevate their role in the global arena, like Turkey has been trying to do, although with different capabilities and to a different extent, since the 1990s and more pronouncedly in the last two decades.

### *Patterns of Alliances*

Another consequence of a shifting international polarity has been new patterns of alliances. Especially in the last two decades, while the US hegemon was extricating itself from a conflict-ridden region as the Middle East, the growing security challenges led to a latent-anarchic, self-help system in which security and survival were at stake. Already marked by long-standing internal clashes, the Middle East has heated up with the constant proliferation of threats under the increasing permeability of borders and power rivalries. In a volatile region, states have used different foreign policy tools, such as balancing, strategic hedging, and bandwagoning, as part of a strategy that includes conflict and cooperation. As power is more diffused and fragmented among a broader range of competing state and non-state actors, security concerns primarily lead to new pacts and alliances. Although neither Russia nor China can match the US presence in the Middle East, regional powers have tended to cooperate more with non-Western powers in the post-unipolar world. The systemic incentives and constraints have also led to a series of back-and-forth plays in TFP, with the power-maximizing behavior accompanied by a balancing strategy. As Turkey and the US gradually lost their shared strategic outlook in multiple regional conflicts, Ankara played a delicate balancing game between major powers to increase its room to maneuver and pursue its own interests.

To address the question of whether TFP is proactive or reactive, it is essential to make some premises. Despite unparalleled activist policies characterizing the AKP's rise, TFP remains constricted by the limitations of middle/rising powers and domestic-regional security imperatives.

Thus, though heterodox on many fronts, Turkish policymakers' attitudes might resemble a case-by-case compromise on internal agents' threats-opportunities perception rather than undiscussed revisionism in grand strategy elaborations. For instance, if Turkey's ambition to maintain a leading role through more autonomy is undeniable, its ongoing commitment to NATO<sup>227</sup> and periodical rapprochements to the EU denotes rational calculations against the risks of "new forms of dependence" on non-Western countries.<sup>228</sup> Thus, this assumption could provide more balanced explanations for how, though lacking their original normative commitment, Turkey-West relations still leave room for a new transactional, interest-driven *modus vivendi*.<sup>229</sup> Equally crucial is recognizing that "whenever Turkey felt strong enough to play a regional role and the focus of the global hegemon of the time had moved elsewhere, it stirred to acquire a greater role in its neighborhood."<sup>230</sup> Moreover, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza have enhanced again Turkey's attempt to play the cards of either "active neutrality" or "proactive helper," namely, the effort to play a key and visible role in the crisis while preserving its national interests.<sup>231</sup>

### 2.3.1.3. *Regional Parameters*

#### *Threats and Opportunities*

To understand how change has occurred in TFP, this research considers how variations in the international system impact variations at the regional level. To do so, as suggested by Tziarras in its work on TFP, it looks at how states perceive the threats and opportunities coming from the external environment differently.<sup>232</sup> An important premise is that using "external threat perceptions" rather than "international" threat perceptions means that these are not limited to perceptions of states alone but include all exogenous threat perceptions that affect foreign policy-making. However, while classical and neoclassical realists would insert here the role of ideational elements (intended as religion, national values, and culture...),<sup>233</sup> this research makes a distinction between the latter and

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<sup>227</sup> Giannotta, V. (2021). Turkey and NATO. A fluctuating relationship. In M. Testoni (Ed.), *NATO and transatlantic relations in the 21st century: Foreign and security policy perspectives*. Routledge.

<sup>228</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021.

<sup>229</sup> Aydın-Düzgüt, S., & Kaliber A. (2016). Encounters with Europe in an era of domestic and international turmoil: is Turkey a de-Europeanising candidate country?, *South European Society and Politics* 21 (1), 1-14.

<sup>230</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 2020..

<sup>231</sup> Gözkaman, A. (2022). Türkiye's Foreign Policy vis-à-vis the War in Ukraine: A New Version of Active Neutrality. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 27(2), 159-176.

<sup>232</sup> Tziarras, Z. (2014). Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East under the AKP (2002-2013): A Neoclassical Realist Account [PhD Thesis]. University of Warwick.

<sup>233</sup> Walt, S. M. (2007). *The origins of alliances* (1. publ. paperb. 1990, [Nachdr.]). Cornell Univ. Press, 21-22. As Walt proposes, four factors can give rise to threat/opportunity perceptions and determine their intensity level: the aggregate power of a state poses a threat depending on its level – the greater the power, the bigger the posed threat; geographic proximity – the closer a state is to another the

state perceptions. For example, it accepts that the role of ideology could be seen in a state's protection of principles, in the existence of less fear because of similar ideologies and values between states, in the increase of a regime's legitimacy through its participation in a larger group/movement, and the mere prescription of alignment by ideology. In the same way, however, ideologies and values may cause "conflict and dissension" as well.<sup>234</sup>

However, this association is seen here in relation to how threat perceptions are a point where systemic pressures and domestic factors meet.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, in light of its objective to trace foreign policy change in TFP, perceptions of threats and opportunities at this external level are intended in the form of either variations or continuities at the state level, namely in Turkey's strategic culture, alliance behavior, and its role, reaction, or proactiveness in front of structural changes or historical events. As the next section will explain, this implies that other ideational elements (like ideology, religion, beliefs, and values) are studied at the domestic and individual levels to give more agency to the human factor in foreign policy making.

In order to look at the dynamics of change, it is important to assess how, according to various levels of polarization in the international order, Turkey's regional level has also been changing, prompting the country to pursue different strategies according to its perception of threats and opportunities deriving from these parallel changes. The passages from a bipolar to a unipolar order dominated by the US have asked a regional and middle power like Turkey to revise its role in order to: prove its geostrategic value for its traditional allies, grasp the opportunities of the more relaxed environment to expand its interests in new geographical areas; at the same time, elaborate new strategies to cope with new threats emerging from increased competition with other emerging players.

### *The Actions of Other Regional States and Actors*

However, the recent retreat of the US from the region created a perception of a power vacuum, prompting two primary foreign policy behaviors: power maximization and balancing. This transition contributed to the emergence of a de-centered "post-western world," or post-liberal international order, where non-western authoritarian powers like China and Russia presented alternative

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bigger the threat, given that power projection "declines with distance;" a state's offensive power/capabilities – geographic proximity or aggregate power do not necessarily entail offensive capabilities; and the intentions of a state, namely how either a state's apparent aggressiveness and expansionism or its perceived aggressive intentions by other states play a role in alliance choices. It is argued that weaker powers may include both state and non-state actors, and this is evident in the case of Turkey, especially when it comes to the Kurdish separatist movement. Hama, 2020.

<sup>234</sup> Rousseau, D. L., & Garcia-Retamero, R. (2007). Identity, power, and threat perception: A cross-national experimental study. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51(5), 744-771.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 745.

development models.<sup>236</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa, the geopolitical turmoil following the Arab Uprising and multiple state failures and conflicts amplified the impact of the perceived US disengagement. Taking advantage of this perceived void, regional actors adopted a maximalist approach to pursue greater strategic autonomy. In this permissive strategic environment, states had a broader range of strategies to address potential threats and opportunities. International players like Russia, along with regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, and the UAE, pursued power-maximizing behaviors to elevate their regional and global standings. In this period, for some, Turkey's foreign policy strategy evolved from integrationist revisionism to autonomous expansionism, reflecting a shift from its traditional Western alignment during the Cold War to a more active regional role post-Cold War.<sup>237</sup>

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 further incentivized Turkey's involvement in the Middle East, positioning itself as a model for a new Middle East with Western-friendly democratic governments under the US's Greater Middle East Initiative. However, Turkey's foreign policy became increasingly proactive and multidimensional, often aligning with US and EU interests. Turkey sought more space and autonomy to enhance its global and regional profile in the post-unipolar global system.<sup>238</sup> It adopted a maximalist approach, aiming for regional hegemony, especially after the Arab Uprisings, anticipating the rise of Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) offshoots in the region but also having troubled relations with many non-state actors (NSAs) like Daesh (IS, Islamic State) or Kurdish groups across different areas. This integrationist approach gave way to a more autonomous, interventionist policy, particularly after the siege of Kobani, Syria, in 2015 and the 2016 failed coup. Turkey engaged in assertive, unilateral actions such as drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean and military operations in Northern Iraq and Syria, competing with other regional powers like the UAE and Saudi Arabia for influence, notably through its involvement in the Libyan conflict and extending its presence to the Horn of Africa.<sup>239</sup>

Therefore, it is crucial to consider that shifts in the international order are highly connected to the regional order in the sense that not only the maneuvers of major powers can condition, trigger, or limit the actions of regional players but also the objectives and strategies of the latter have the potential to restrict (or enlarge) the room of action of ambitious regional powers.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Stuenkel, O. (2016). Post-western world: How emerging powers are remaking global order. Polity.

<sup>237</sup> For a discussion, see Taş, 2022.

<sup>238</sup> Lynch, M. (2021). The Arab Uprisings Never Ended The Enduring Struggle to Remake the Middle East. *Foreign Affairs* (New York, N.Y.), 100(1), 111.

<sup>239</sup> Gürzel & Ersoy, 2020.

<sup>240</sup> Ehteshami, A. (2024). Multipolarity and the Middle East Questions going forward. In B. Houghton & K. A. Houghton (Eds.), *China, Russia, and the USA in the Middle East: The contest for supremacy*. Routledge; Lieber, R. J. (2022). Polarity, Non-polarity, and the Risks of A-Polarity. In N. Græger, B. Heurlin, O. Wæver, & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Polarity in International Relations* (pp. 171–189). Springer International Publishing.



### 2.3.1.4. External Projection Parameters

#### *Foreign Policy Capabilities and Foreign Policy Instruments*

Because power measurements are contextual, perspectival, dynamic, and fluid, there is no universally accepted definition of state power in international affairs.<sup>241</sup> In this regard, the present study accepts Barnett and Duvall's suggestion that researchers "should employ multiple conceptions of power and develop a conceptual framework that encourages rigorous attention to power in its different forms."<sup>242</sup> With this premise in mind, the current research relies on the taxonomy proposed by Moga et al., which recognizes the importance of including different strands of "power".<sup>243</sup> The first three factors are the so-called material ones that are quantifiable and not easy to alter and refer to, respectively: size (surface area and population), geographic location, economic weight, and military capabilities.<sup>244</sup> For instance, in the case of Turkey, being part of NATO and a candidate for the European Union has implications for both the state's interests and the external policies of the alliances.<sup>245</sup> In addition to population size, military resources are tied to the extent of budgetary expenditure and investment a state is willing to allocate for supporting, equipping, and technologically modernizing its armed forces. The availability of these resources dictates the state's capacity to ensure its own defense and engage in military actions.<sup>246</sup>

Conversely, nonmaterial factors are more variable in the sense that they are defined by the ability of a state to pursue a given policy or behavior at a particular time) and difficult to quantify.

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<sup>241</sup> For an early discussion, see Nye, J. S., & Keohane, R. O. (1971). *Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction*. *International Organization*, 25(3), 329–349

<sup>242</sup> Barnett, M., & Duvall, R. (2005). Power in International Politics. *International Organization*, 59(01); Adler & Barnett 1998, 36; Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K. (1998). International Norm Dynamics and Political Change. *International Organization*, 52(4), 887; Thorhallsson, B., & Wivel, A. (2006). Small States in the European Union: What Do We Know and What Would We Like to Know? *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 19(4), 655.

<sup>243</sup> Moga, T. L., Bureiko, N., Gheorghiu, A., & Ibănescu, B. C. (2023). Testing a Six-Factor Model on Perceived State Power and Influence: The Case of Romania. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1–22. Among many others, see Waltz 2010; Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). *The tragedy of great power politics* (Updated edition). W.W. Norton & Company; Thorhallsson, B. (2006). The Size of States in the European Union: Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives. *Journal of European Integration*, 28(1), 8.

<sup>244</sup> Thorhallsson 2006, 16; Keohane, R. O. (1969). Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics. *International Organization*, 23(2), 291–310; Väyrynen, R. (1971). On the Definition and Measurement of Small Power Status. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 6(1), 91–102; Thorhallsson, B., & Steinsson, S. (2017). Small State Foreign Policy. In B. Thorhallsson & S. Steinsson, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press; Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>245</sup> Ojanen, H. (2004). Inter-organisational relations as a factor shaping the EU's external identity. Finnish Institute of International Affairs; Salamon, L. M., & Siegfried, J. J. (1977). Economic Power and Political Influence: The Impact of Industry Structure on Public Policy. *American Political Science Review*, 71(3), 1026–1043; Lukes, S. (2004). *Power: A radical view* (2nd ed). Palgrave Macmillan, 76.

<sup>246</sup> Thorhallsson 2006, 18.

These factors, often aggregated in the concept of soft power,<sup>247</sup> entail a normative nature (namely, they promote diplomatic solutions and good international citizenship) and include a state's history and culture, domestic institutions and ability to influence international negotiations, and membership in international organizations.<sup>248</sup> History and culture play a key role in the power a state wants to project abroad. Particularly in the immediate neighborhood, the historical record of state relations determines the intensity of exchanges (political, economic, and cultural).<sup>249</sup> Domestic institutions and the quality of expertise indicate the ability of the national administration to formulate and implement policies internally efficiently.<sup>250</sup> Conversely, a state might be considered vulnerable or weak internationally if its institutional apparatus is pressured by domestic discontent or political competition. Last, membership in international organizations is essential in determining a state's international posture.<sup>251</sup> States that act as "norm entrepreneurs" and successfully promote solutions based on their own normative convictions.<sup>252</sup> It also increases a state's influence inside and outside the organization, making foreign policy goals achievable through its structures, whether in alignment with them or by spoiling the deficiencies of such systems.<sup>253</sup>

Coherently with this framework and taxonomy, this research clusters the parameters above into two main categories: foreign policy capabilities and foreign policy instruments. It looks at how TFP has changed regarding material and immaterial capabilities and how this has affected the instruments it deployed to pursue its strategic objectives (national interest and grand strategy) and political objectives (regime survival and domestic consumption). This is in line with what the literature on the topic suggests.<sup>254</sup> One theme to analyze is the passage from a so-called "benevolent power" and "trading state" to a "security-oriented" and assertive actor in order to see whether changes in structural parameters such as economic or military capabilities are necessarily linked to foreign policy change or whether they are also (or more) related to the Turkish elites' aim to seek a greater status for the country, regardless to actual capabilities. Here, looking at the growing defense industry

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<sup>247</sup> Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft power. *Foreign policy*, (80), 153-171.

<sup>248</sup> Moga, T. L., Bureiko, N., Gheorghiu, A., & Ibănescu, B.-C. (2023). Testing a Six-Factor Model on Perceived State Power and Influence: The Case of Romania. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1-22.

<sup>249</sup> Nye, J. S. (2005). On the Rise and Fall of American Soft Power. *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 22(3), 75-77.

<sup>250</sup> Thorhallsson 2006, 16.

<sup>251</sup> For instance, the European Union and NATO are known for enhancing interstate cooperation by cultivating common values. Participation in such organizations is thus perceived as a source of legitimation, as it assures a state's adherence to international norms; Baba, G., & Önsöy, M. (2016). Between capability and foreign policy: Comparing Turkey's small power and middle power status. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 13(51), 3-20.

<sup>252</sup> Finnemore & Sikkink 1998, 894; Wivel 2005, 396.

<sup>253</sup> Archer & Nugent 2006; Thorhallsson 2006; Copsey, N., & Haughton, T. (2009). The Choices for Europe: National Preferences in New and Old Member States. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 47(2), 263-286.

<sup>254</sup> The following paragraphs are drawn from the literature review of this project. Therefore, references to the following concepts are not necessarily repeated here.

helps to uncover many questions related to concepts like “drone diplomacy,” “strategic autonomy, and “techno-nationalism.”<sup>255</sup>

Another issue related to inquiries of real or perceived power is the necessity of middle powers to create a specific perception of the state abroad and domestically. For instance, it is interesting to examine whether the transition from the so-called “Turkish model” to a model of authoritarian diffusion is related to an overall change in foreign policy or just to a strategy of reaction rather than pro-activeness. This occurs together with the fact that a historical analysis should consider that patterns and path-dependent strategies have always been a characteristic in TFP’s swing between engagement with the West while looking at other areas of interest like the Muslim World or the recent activism in Africa. The same goes for less material parameters, like informal and personal diplomacy, cultural investments, and the sponsoring of several non-state actors, which help to understand the shifts in Turkey’s strategies and interests and the instruments deployed to achieve such objectives.

### **2.3.2. The Internal Level**

As demonstrated by the previous theoretical discussion, IR theory has lately developed to incorporate domestic political and decision-making factors.<sup>256</sup> Variants of realism, liberalism, and constructivism have integrated state motives, perceptions, public opinion, and political culture. Such a turn is well developed in FPA research, whose central concern is “examining the ‘inside the black box’ of states to explain foreign policy.”<sup>257</sup> Indeed, FPA is not a single theory but proposes a distinct starting point for explaining international relations in which leaders’ subjective understandings filter the influence of all other international, domestic, institutional, and societal factors.<sup>258</sup> Given these considerations, this project does not embrace FPA with an exclusionary view on other IR theories. Instead, it adjusts the latter’s traditional liabilities with the former’s deeper understanding of domestic factors. Therefore, one could summarize the main differences between FPA and IR theories as follows:

Systems become bipolar or multipolar, balanced or unbalanced, nuclear or nuclear-free, polluted or clean, growing or contracting because of the interdependence among individual decisions.

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<sup>255</sup> Soyaltin-Colella & Demiryol, 2023.

<sup>256</sup> This turn dates with Putnam, 1988. For a similar argument, see Hafner-Burton et al., 2017.

<sup>257</sup> Kaarbo, 2015.

<sup>258</sup> Idem. For instance, key areas of FPA research are (1) individual and small-group-level psychological factors in foreign policy decision-making, (2) variation in institutional decision-making processes, and (iii) elite-mass relations. For similarities and differences between IR and FPA and a discussion of the key topics in the FPA subfield. See also De Mesquita, B. B. (2002). Domestic Politics and International Relations. *International Studies Quarterly*, 46(1), 7.

International politics are not... some predetermined exogenous fact of life [...]International politics are formed by the aggregated consequences of...individual and collective decisions.<sup>259</sup>

Considering these premises, it is clear that FPA would challenge NCR's primary assumption (and what makes it realist) that privileges the international system over the domestic system.<sup>260</sup> Conversely, FPA conceives this ordering by treating domestic political and decision-making factors as, at times, equal to or more important than international factors.<sup>261</sup> In addition, NCR often does not justify why certain domestic factors are chosen over others, making the addition of unit-level characteristics seem ad hoc-based.<sup>262</sup> As such, by including poliheuristic theory,<sup>263</sup> FPA offers more complex perspectives on relationships between international and domestic spheres and executives than in much regime security and NCR work.

### ***2.3.2.1. Institutional Parameters. Power Concentration and Elite-Public Opinion Relations***

Although the above-mentioned "third way IR" scholarship has dismissed neorealism for black-boxing the state, it still presents the "regime" as an abstract concept, where the decision-making unit is a catch-all for all regime types.<sup>264</sup> Historians, scholars of Area Studies, and FPA have underlined how, with authoritarian regimes placed in one category, little room is left for factors at bureaucratic, small group, and individual levels affecting the decision-making process.<sup>265</sup> In particular, FPA scholarship argues that even non-democracies are far from uniform<sup>266</sup> and explores

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<sup>259</sup> De Mesquita, 2002, 7.

<sup>260</sup> As such, neoclassical realists concede that systemic dynamics explain long-term trends but argue that domestic factors are needed to understand specific foreign policies. Some focus on domestic politics and state-society relations, putting the national security executive at the center and being able to define the national interest while bargaining with domestic actors to extract resources and make policy. Moreover, it is accepted that domestic politics constrain these elites. Other NCR researchers focus more on ideational elements at the domestic level, such as nationalism and ideology. Finally, decision-making processes, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations are seen by some as important because "neoclassic realist foreign policy analysis stresses that foreign policy decisions are made by human beings, political leaders, and elites." NCR allows for including the role of perceptions, states' motives, nationalism and ideology, and domestic institutions. For an exhaustive overview, see Lobell et al., 2009. In general, NCR "foreign policy analysis stresses that foreign policy decisions are made by human beings, political leaders and elites." Hence, states often react differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities, and their response may be less motivated by systemic-level factors than domestic ones. For reviews of NCR, see Rose, 1998; Ripsman et al, 2016.

<sup>261</sup> Ripsman et al, 2016

<sup>262</sup> Wivel, 2005, 16.

<sup>263</sup> Darwich & Kaarbo, 2020, 231.

<sup>264</sup> D'Amato et al., (2023). See also Fawcett, L. L. (2024). *International relations of the Middle East* (Sixth edition). Oxford University Press, 305.

<sup>265</sup> See for example Quansheng, Z. (1992). Domestic Factors of Chinese Foreign Policy: From Vertical to Horizontal Authoritarianism. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 519(1), 158–175; Costa Buranelli, F. (2020). Authoritarianism as an Institution? The Case of Central Asia. *International Studies Quarterly*, 64(4), 1005–1016.

<sup>266</sup> For example, Kinne, B. J. (2005). Decision Making in Autocratic Regimes: A Poliheuristic Perspective. *International Studies Perspectives*, 6(1), 114–128.

how variation in authoritarian states influences foreign policy processes and outcomes.<sup>267</sup> This challenges the liberal and democratic peace theory's assumption that authoritarian leaders and governments are unaccountable and unconstrained by societal pressures.<sup>268</sup> Moreover, the regime security approach and its regime survival logic often fail to explain how leaders make foreign policy decisions that ignore domestic public opinion.<sup>269</sup>

This is relevant because, while many pillars appear to be fixed and taken for granted when looking at the Turkish state since the foundation of the Republic, many changes have occurred at the institutional level.<sup>270</sup> For instance, while the military has always represented the core of policy-making in Turkey, the last twenty years have witnessed a power shift in civil-military relations in favor of the former. Moreover, Turkish history is rich in military coups, struggles in elaborating new constitutions, and government crises amid economic and political instability.<sup>271</sup> In this sense, factors like a high threshold for parties in national elections and the latest transition to a Presidential system are all parameters of change that need to be considered when adopting an inside-out perspective in the study of TFP.<sup>272</sup>

In this context, an FPA approach helps to explore how these differences can be explained by variations in political institutions, domestic interests, and ruling parties. FPA conceptualizes the role of different domestic political institutional arrangements in many ways.<sup>273</sup> Coalitions, for example,

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> For example, Hagan, J. D. (2001). Does Decision Making Matter? *International Studies Review*, 3(2), 5–46; Davies, G. A. M. (2008). Inside Out or Outside In: Domestic and International Factors Affecting Iranian Foreign Policy Towards the United States 1990–2004. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 4(3), 209–225; Weeks, J. L. P. (2014). *Dictators at war and peace*. Cornell University Press.

<sup>269</sup> For an overview, Rosati, J., & Miller, C. E. (2010). Political Psychology, Cognition, and Foreign Policy Analysis. In J. Rosati & C. E. Miller, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. Oxford University Press. Weeks, J. L. (2008). Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve. *International Organization*, 62(01). Nacos, B. L. (Ed.). (2000). *Decisionmaking in a glass house: Mass media, public opinion, and American and European foreign policy in the 21st century*. Rowman & Littlefield; Dyson, S. B. (2006). Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2(3), 289–306; Dyson, S. B., & Preston, T. (2006). Individual Characteristics of Political Leaders and the Use of Analogy in Foreign Policy Decision Making. *Political Psychology*, 27(2), 265–288; Kreps, S. (2010). Elite Consensus as a Determinant of Alliance Cohesion: Why Public Opinion Hardly Matters for NATO-led Operations in Afghanistan: Elite Consensus as a Determinant of Alliance Cohesion. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 6(3), 191–215. For instance, Baum and Potter characterize the dynamic relationship between the public, the media, and decision-makers “as a marketplace in which the relative distribution of information among these three actors in large part determines their relative influence on foreign policy.” As such, in the early stages of a policy or response to an international event, governments enjoy an information advantage. However, as time passes, there is more opportunity for the public to accumulate sufficient information to overcome – or at least reduce – its informational disadvantage. Baum, M. A., & Potter, P. B. K. (2008). The relationships between mass media, public opinion, and foreign policy: Toward a theoretical synthesis. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11(1), 58.

<sup>270</sup> Kalaycıoğlu, E. (2023). A hundred years of flux: Turkish political regimes from 1921 to 2023. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 412–434.

<sup>271</sup> Esen, B. (2021). Praetorian Army in Action: A Critical Assessment of Civil–Military Relations in Turkey. *Armed Forces & Society*, 47(1), 201–222; Harris, G. S. (2011). Military Coups and Turkish Democracy, 1960–1980. *Turkish Studies*, 12(2), 203–213.

<sup>272</sup> Hale, W. (1980). The role of the electoral system in Turkish politics. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 11(3), 401–417; Erguder, U., & Hofferbert, R. I. (2021). Restoration of Democracy in Turkey? Political Reforms and the Elections of 1983. In L. L. Layne (Ed.), *Elections In The Middle East: Implications Of Recent Trends* (1st ed.). Routledge.

<sup>273</sup> Doyle, M. W. (2016). Liberalism and foreign policy. In S. Smith, A. Hadfield, & T. Dunne (Eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*. Oxford University Press. For example, whether a state has a presidential or a parliamentary system can affect states' level and nature of international commitments<sup>273</sup>, and legislative powers to constrain executives in their foreign policies vary considerably across and within presidential and parliamentary systems. See Mello, P. A., & Peters, D. (2018). Parliaments in security policy: Involvement, politicisation, and influence. *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 20(1), 3–18. Peters, D., & Wagner, W. (2011). Between military efficiency and democratic legitimacy: Mapping parliamentary war powers in contemporary democracies, 1989–2004. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 64(1), 175–192.

tend to be extreme in their foreign policy behaviors, and single-party governments tend to be moderate<sup>274</sup>, and coalitions' foreign policy behaviors also differ depending on the number of parties in the cabinet and the level of support in Parliament.<sup>275</sup> Hagan et al., for instance, claim that the authority and actors involved in foreign policy-making procedures should obtain consensus on issues when a foreign policy decision necessitates allocating national resources.<sup>276</sup> Translating this theoretical understanding to the Turkish case, this seems in line with Robins's arguments regarding the nature of coalition politics in Turkey, for which their typical characteristics are ideological and factionist attitudes, along with clashes between personalities and disruptions created by these problems.<sup>277</sup> Overall, this project argues that the type of distribution may affect the rationality of decisions – for example, whether regimes over- or underreact to threats.<sup>278</sup> The leader-dominant model has historically prevailed in the authoritarian republics of the Middle East. In Turkey, this dynamic was traditionally skewed towards a National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*, MGK) under the President, composed of the cabinet and military chiefs. However, over time, the locus of power has shifted towards civilian authorities, particularly the ruling party.<sup>279</sup> This evolution also warrants an examination of its long-term implications on foreign policy formulation.

In this regard, Turkey's foreign policy-making process can be seen as involving two main groups: the state elite and the governing elite.<sup>280</sup> The state elite, as defined by Chris Hill's concept of foreign policy "cognoscenti,"<sup>281</sup> adheres to Kemalism, emphasizing national unity and secularism. This group includes the career military and the civilian bureaucracy, dominated by the MFA.<sup>282</sup> Similar to Ottoman times, the MFA remained for a long time an elite institution, with its members often educated

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<sup>274</sup> Kaarbo, J., & Beasley, R. K. (2008). Taking It to the Extreme: The Effect of Coalition Cabinets on Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 4(1), 67–81.

<sup>275</sup> Beasley, R. K., & Kaarbo, J. (2014). Explaining Extremity in the Foreign Policies of Parliamentary Democracies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(4), 729–740.

<sup>276</sup> Accordingly, the partition of the position of any partner, or "precise distribution of power" in a coalition government, such as a number of ministries and related state institutions that are controlled by the partners, is accepted as a basic factor in determining policy-making." See Hagan, J. D., Everts, P. P., Fukui, H., & Stempel, J. D. (2001). Foreign policy by coalition: deadlock, compromise, and anarchy. *International Studies Review*, 3(2), 169–216. However, Karbo states that junior partners can influence policy decisions despite holding relatively less power in a coalition. She highlights that the senior party must be in a kind of consensus with the junior one in the coalition. See Kaarbo, J. (2013). *Coalition politics and cabinet decision making: A comparative analysis of foreign policy choices* (1. paperback ed). Univ. of Michigan Press.

<sup>277</sup> Robins, 2006.

<sup>278</sup> For instance, the excessive autonomy of leaders devoid of accountability poses the risk of pursuing irrational and idiosyncratic policies, whereas excessive fragmentation within bureaucratic branches can result in policy incoherence. Kaarbo, 2013; Kolltveit, K. (2014). Concentration of power in cabinets: Exploring the importance of the party political context. *Acta Politica*, 49(3), 266–285.

<sup>279</sup> Kars Kaynar, A. (2017). Political Activism of the National Security Council in Turkey After the Reforms. *Armed Forces & Society*, 43(3), 523–544.

<sup>280</sup> Robins, 2006.

<sup>281</sup> Hill, 2006, 42.

<sup>282</sup> Robins, 2006, 208. Due to several factors: The military's coercive power and its perceived legitimacy to intervene in politics since 1960 deterred internal challenges. A notable exception was Turgut Özal, who, especially between 1987 and 1991, asserted civilian control over the military; The MFA's extensive institutional memory has made it difficult to challenge its policy recommendations; The ideological, factional, and personality divisions that have distracted coalition governments in Turkey; Successive governments have placed less emphasis on foreign affairs than on domestic policies, often leaving foreign policy to professionals due to electoral considerations.

at the same schools and universities as in the past century. Seemingly, the Kemalist military has always played a significant role as the protector of state policy's strategic parameters. In contrast, the governing elite is more dynamic and representative of Turkey's diverse "societal peripheries." This pluralism is evident ideologically (embracing different shades of Kemalism, Islamism, and Turkish nationalism), socio-economically (representing various class formations), and regionally (involving different cultural and local interests).

Yet, since November 2002, the balance between state and governing elites has shifted. The AKP governing elite emerged from elections institutionally strong, with a significant parliamentary majority that even allowed for constitutional reforms. The AKP's single-party government promised greater coherence, representing an Anatolian counter-elite and a broader population on major cities' outskirts. Its ideological ambiguity, labeled variously as "conservative, post-Islamist, or Islamic-rooted," began to highlight a deliberate strategy to change a political milieu shaped by past traumas, such as the military's intervention against the Welfare Party in 1997.

At the same time, a dualistic approach does not allow us to grasp the nuances that have lately become more evident in Turkey's political milieu. As noted by Kösebalaban, this understanding "offers interesting observations on Turkey's strategic culture, but occasionally generalizes the Kemalist culture of insecurity as a general property of the entire Turkish nation."<sup>283</sup> For instance, the Kemalist foreign policy goals are frequently described as "the best examples of the ideologically driven nature of Kemalist foreign policy was in its Westpolitik, embracing as it has done a variety of different issues from Turkey's membership of NATO and its relationship with the United States, to its attempts to become a member of the EU".<sup>284</sup> However, "any observer of Turkish politics would acknowledge the stiff resistance to Turkey's EU membership mounted by the Kemalist political as well as intellectual establishment, a resistance that is deeply rooted in their culture of insecurity shaped by historical memory."<sup>285</sup>

Worth mentioning here is also the peculiar character of Turkey's civil-military relations (CMR). Since the early 20th century, Turkish society has maintained a direct connection with the military, seen as the "state," and a more tenuous, secondary relationship with its politicians and politics, viewed as the "government."<sup>286</sup> This highlights how, despite formal separation, military and civilian authorities have formed a partnership based on an imperfect concordance among the army, political

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<sup>283</sup> Kösebalaban, H. (2004). Review. Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 21(1), 119–121.

<sup>284</sup> Quoting Robins, P. (2003). *Suits and uniforms: Turkish foreign policy since the Cold War*. University of Washington Press, 139.

<sup>285</sup> Kösebalaban, 2004, 3.

<sup>286</sup> Aydın, E. (2009). A Paradigmatic Shift for the Turkish Generals and an End to the Coup Era in Turkey. *The Middle East Journal*, 63(4), 581–596; Heper, M., & Güney, A. (1996). The Military and Democracy in the Third Turkish Republic. *Armed Forces & Society*, 22(4), 619–642.

elites, and the citizenry.<sup>287</sup> The civil authority relies on the military for the defense of the state and territorial integrity. Regarding the Turkish military's guardianship, its record of failed (1962, 1963, 2016) and successful (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997) interventions is often explained by mainstream theories as power dynamics between the secular, patriotic, rational soldier and the elected, but inefficient and anti-secularist politician.<sup>288</sup> Against this limited view, as both History and FPA call to do, it is essential to consider both the structural, cultural, and personal dimension of Turkey's CMR to understand its highly interactive and transformative character and "the possibility of collaboration and institutional-functional interpenetration in a fairly large setting of shared understandings that derive from Turkey's historical and sociopolitical context."<sup>289</sup>

A wider view can also detect how tensions arose between the military and groups challenging "the secular nature of the state (the Islamists), or its unitary character (Kurdish nationalists and separatists)."<sup>290</sup> The fact that the military often intervened during crises when governments failed to act effectively according to Kemalist principles led to the assumption that the military's tutelage over society stems from an alleged in-group homogeneity.<sup>291</sup> However, refuting the idea of the Turkish military as a unitary actor helps explain how its tutelary function varied over time and highlights the different political and ideological stances within the military.<sup>292</sup>

### 2.3.2.2. *Immaterial Parameters*

With regard to immaterial elements (like ideology, religion, and personal beliefs), the study of foreign policy in IR has witnessed a rise in constructivist perspectives that brought more attention to domestic politics. Constructivist research, for example, points to the importance of discourse, ideas,

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<sup>287</sup> Narlı, N. (2000). Civil-military relations in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 1(1), 119. The civil authority relies on the military for the defense of the state and territorial integrity. In contrast, the military depends on the civil authority for the recognition of their legitimacy in line with fundamental democratic principles. Yet, the key issue is "how to maintain a strong and effective military that poses no threat to the civilian elite." See Eldem, T. (Ed.). (2019). Civilian Control of Armed Forces. In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Global Security Studies* (pp. 1–10). Springer International Publishing; Burk, J. (2002). Theories of Democratic Civil-Military Relations. *Armed Forces & Society*, 29(1), 15.

<sup>288</sup> Demirel, T. (2004). Soldiers and civilians: The dilemma of Turkish democracy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(1), 145.

<sup>289</sup> Mardin, Ş. (2013). Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes. In B. M. Rubin & A. Çarkoğlu (Eds.), *Religion and Politics in Turkey*. Taylor and Francis, 146.

<sup>290</sup> Narlı 2000, 120.

<sup>291</sup> Esen 2021, 202.

<sup>292</sup> Narlı 2000, 126. While there is broad agreement on military involvement during national threats, a vocal minority, including Islamist, pro-Kurdish groups, liberals, and leftists, increasingly challenge the armed forces. For instance, the 1997 "post-modern coup" and the failed 2016 coup, despite differing characteristics and outcomes, demonstrated the ongoing importance of co-opting the army through benefits or ideological symmetries for rulers to secure their positions. See also Akkoyunlu, K. (2007). Military reform and democratisation: Turkish and Indonesian experiences at the turn of the millenium (1. publ). Routledge, 36; Abrami, S. C. A. (2024). Tutelary but not unitary. The role of ideology and political culture in Turkey's civil-military relations during the Cold War. In F. Bertuccioli (Ed.), *Toward a Cultural History of the Cold War in Turkey. Ideological dynamics, cultural production, media*. Sapienza University of Rome.



identity, and roles in alternative explanations of interest-based and material explanations of foreign policies.<sup>293</sup> However, FPA research challenges constructivism for prioritizing social structures over agency, for its difficulty in unpacking processes through which identities change, and for not addressing why some identities, among others, become salient in foreign policy-making.<sup>294</sup> Conversely, “FPA research not only examines micro-foundations of agent’s relationships to structure, but it allows for varying perceptions of, instrumental uses of, and responses to structures.”

Second, constructivism also lacks attention to how the society is constructed (black-boxing the process) and does not take seriously how ideational factors operate within individuals’ belief systems and are aggregated to the social level via institutional and cultural.<sup>295</sup> In contrast, including the importance of the historical background in constructing identities, FPA suggests that when identities are contested, elites may frame and manipulate public opinion or even operate fairly free of the public and against mass-level identities and values.<sup>296</sup> FPA research offers insights into how norm, identity, and role contestation affect the policymaking process and resulting foreign policy behavior.<sup>297</sup> FPA research on elite conflict has concentrated on conflicts between governing elites and political opposition within governing coalitions, in small decision-making and advisory groups, and across bureaucratic agencies.<sup>298</sup>

Relevant here to bear in mind is that decision-makers have limited access to appropriate information and are uncertain about which policies are suitable in response to a given scenario.<sup>299</sup> Coherently, foreign policy strategies encompass not only military means and ends but the means and

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<sup>293</sup> Wendt, 1999. While some constructivist work operates at the system level, focusing on shared norms and general social construction of international politics,<sup>293</sup> other constructivists go inside states, engaging with ideational and normative factors at societal levels. Constructivist research, for example, points to the importance of discourse, ideas, identity, and roles in alternative explanations of interest-based and material explanations of foreign policies. See Hopf, T. (2002). *Social construction of international politics: Identities & foreign policies*, Moscow, 1955 and 1999. Cornell University Press.

<sup>294</sup> Kaarbo, 2015, 201.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid. Constructivist research on norm entrepreneurs and the domestic internalization of international norms is a notable exception, but even this literature rarely engages FPA work and often treats domestic politics and decision making lightly. For the first, see Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K. (1998). International Norm Dynamics and Political Change. *International Organization*, 52(4), 887–917; Breuning, M. (2011). State of the art and blind spots. In S. Harnisch, C. Frank, & H. Maull (Eds.), *Role theory in international relations: Approaches and analyses*. Routledge. Barnett, M. (1999). Culture, Strategy and Foreign Policy Change: Israel’s Road to Oslo. *European Journal of International Relations*, 5(1), 5–36 is a notable exception to this. On this matter, FPA is rich in analysis focused on the Middle East. See, for example, Telhami, S. (1993). Arab Public Opinion and the Gulf War. *Political Science Quarterly*, 108(3), 437–452; Furia, P. A., & Lucas, R. E. (2006). Determinants of Arab Public Opinion on Foreign Relations. *International Studies Quarterly*, 50(3), 585–605.

<sup>296</sup> Rathbun, B. C. (2004). *Partisan interventions: European party politics and peace enforcement in the Balkans*. Cornell University Press; Page, B. I., & Barabas, J. (2000). Foreign Policy Gaps between Citizens and Leaders. *International Studies Quarterly*, 44(3), 339–364. h

<sup>297</sup> Wagner, W. (2006). The democratic control of military power Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), 200–216; Hart, P. ’t, Stern, E. K., & Sundelius, B. (Eds.). (1997). *Beyond groupthink: Political group dynamics and foreign policy-making*. Univ. of Michigan Press; Özkeçeci-Taner, B. (2009). *The role of ideas in coalition government foreign policymaking: The case of Turkey between 1991 and 2002*. Republic of Letters Pub. : Brill; Cantir & Juliet 2016.

<sup>298</sup> On the determinants of Arab public opinion, see Telhami, 1993, pp. 437–52. and Furia & Lucas, 2006.

<sup>299</sup> Kitchen, N. (2010). Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation. *Review of international studies*, 36(1), 117–143; Wivel, 2005.

ends of politics, economics, and ideology.<sup>300</sup> These strategies, thus, stem from the level at which systemic and unit-level factors converge with matters of national security<sup>301</sup>, where ideas may intervene at different locations at the unit level through (1) the specific individuals that hold them, (2) institutions in which they may become embedded, (3) the broader culture of the state.<sup>302</sup> Hence, “leaders define the national interests and conduct foreign policy based on their assessment of relative power and other states’ intentions, but always subject to domestic constraints.”<sup>303</sup> Mediated through institutions and individuals who are blinded to potential alternatives, ideas embedded in national culture, therefore, have the potential to explain why some states act contrary to the structural imperatives of the international system<sup>304</sup>, why states respond differently to the same international challenges, and also to rationalize “when they exhibit continuity in their views on the structure of international institutions.”<sup>305</sup>

With this understanding, foreign policy strategies or doctrines typically mirror decision-makers’ perceptions of both international and domestic events, their views on their country’s global position, and a summary of what they perceive as the national interests and the methods to achieve them – essentially, an effort at grand strategizing.<sup>306</sup> As Aydın underscores, although we can accept that grand strategy is the employment of the state’s resources, including military strength, diplomacy, and intelligence, “the relative importance of these and the ability of leaders to utilize them at any given time change and are usually constrained by such factors as the geography of the state, the history of the nation, the ideational connections of the leadership, the distribution of power in the international system and among the regional powers.”<sup>307</sup> In this regard, Turkey has never published a full-scale official doctrine paper in the academic sense of the concept. However, various versions of the unpublished and secret National Security Policy Document contain indications of such a strategy. Similarly, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Defense do not have traditions of sharing their policy directions and, more importantly, their overall policy frameworks with the public, though the latter used to publish a “white book” dealing with the country’s security and military strategies.<sup>308</sup> Moreover, as Turkey, on occasion in the past, had Ministers with less than three months in office, it has been difficult for some of them and even

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<sup>300</sup> Silove, N. (2018). Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of “Grand Strategy.” *Security Studies*, 27(1), 27–57.

<sup>301</sup> Mor, B. D. (2006). Public diplomacy in grand strategy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2(2), 157-176.

<sup>302</sup> Yee, A. S. (1996). The causal effects of ideas on policies. *International organization*, 50(1), 69-108.

<sup>303</sup> Lobell, et al., 2009.

<sup>304</sup> Idem.

<sup>305</sup> Wivel, 2005.

<sup>306</sup> Aydın, 2020.

<sup>307</sup> Aydın, 2020, 220.

<sup>308</sup> The tradition was discontinued after 2000. For an example, see the English version here: Turkish Ministry of National Defense. (2000, August). *Turkish Ministry of National Defense*. Ankara: Mönch Media. [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154907/Turkey\\_2000eng.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/154907/Turkey_2000eng.pdf).

sometimes for governments as a whole to articulate their different policy visions before they were ousted. Even with the longer-serving ministers, Prime Ministers, or Presidents, it has not been a regular Turkish state practice to prepare or declare doctrines/strategies beforehand in the fields of foreign and security policy.

Connected to this conceptualization is the fact that, contrary to realist approaches, the international role and the national identity of one country are subject to the contestation of several domestic actors, ranging from the ruling elite itself to political parties and public opinion and interest groups. Indeed, as also some NCR and Area Studies research shows, a state's foreign policy role implies an identity and defines orientations toward neighbors (friend or enemy), toward great powers (threat or patron), and the state system (revisionist or status quo). Elites construct roles in interaction with other states and their publics (likely reflecting the interests of dominant social forces in the regime). The role also includes a *modus operandi* incorporating state elites' experience (learning, accumulated memory) in balancing economic needs, geopolitical imperatives, domestic opinion, and state capabilities. Disagreement over role conceptions occurs "vertically" – between elites and masses – and/or "horizontally" – between elite groups.<sup>309</sup> Here, "contestation" means the full range of practices of political dispute, from narrow disagreement over particular policies, decisions, and legislative acts to disagreements over the norms and ideologies underpinning them.<sup>310</sup>

In this sense, providing a historical outlook of how Turkey "immerses itself" and how critical junctures asked its policymakers (but also its populace in general) to shape its identity helps to avoid the risk of taking Turkey's role for granted as structural and power-related approaches would do. In other words, here, questioning the longer processes of state and sociopolitical formation becomes fundamental as role conceptions can also come from leaders' individual beliefs and ideologies or leaders' interpretations of their state's history, cultural, and material capabilities.<sup>311</sup> On this point, Lisel Hintz<sup>312</sup> argues that the practice of foreign policy provides an arena in which elites can compete against their domestic rivals as much as their international counterparts. Proposing that elites seek to circumvent such obstacles by "taking the fight outside," her work explores foreign policy as a counter-intuitive site for contesting domestic identity debates. This is because individuals believe that

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<sup>309</sup> Cantir, C., & Kaarbo, J. (Eds.). (2016). *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations* (1st edition). Routledge. See also Kaarbo, J. (2019). A foreign policy analysis perspective on *After Victory*. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 21(1), 34.

<sup>310</sup> Idem.

<sup>311</sup> Ovali, for example, uses role theory to explain the concept of change in Turkish foreign policy following the AKP's rise to power. In this sense, states have the agency to define their own roles and accept, reject, or alter-cast the roles sought by others. Ovali, S. (2013). Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East: A Role Theory Perspective. *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 20(1), 1–21.

<sup>312</sup> Hintz, 2018.

the more widely supported their identity proposal is, the more likely they will be able to access institutions that are advantageous to achieving the goals (interests) their identity prescribes.<sup>313</sup>

One consistent and perhaps most prominent finding is that actors with institutional power are more likely to successfully enact their preferred roles, even in a competitive environment that poses challenges for decision-makers.<sup>314</sup> For instance, in his excellent analysis of Turkey's domestic role contestation, Özdamar highlights how Prime Ministers and presidents with institutional power can effectively advocate for their preferred role conceptions.<sup>315</sup> Conversely, weakened institutional power – marked by divisions within ruling parties, party fragmentation, or coalition politics – makes it more difficult for elites to enact their preferred roles, as this creates a more competitive environment where veto players may hinder enactment. Another approach suggests that “historical role experiences, which do not ‘dissolve’ easily, are prone to reproduce historical patterns of cooperation and conflict and thus may lead to considerable role conflict as ‘historical animosities’ become self-fulfilling prophecies in current policy making.”<sup>316</sup>

In a nutshell, for the sake of this thesis, this implies going beyond an understanding of agents as simple categories and factors to add to a pre-established equation in favor of an analysis that takes into account both macro (e.g. how actors interact with the structure) and micro (e.g. how agents' peculiarities condition their interactions with the structure and other agents) parameters.<sup>317</sup>

### **2.3.2.3. Decision-making: Process and Agents**

After considering the parameters connecting the external and internal dimensions of TFP and offering a historical (de)construction of its parameters, it is essential to address how this combination influences the central, crucial decision-making process, representing the linkage between empirical outcomes and the institutional setting, mechanism, and processes behind these observable features. This helps to answer one of the research questions of this thesis about whether the *TFP decision- and policy-making process is a centralized “one-man show” or still constrained by a plurality of actors*,

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<sup>313</sup> In her study, “this framework, therefore, facilitates the analysis of topics such as changes in how an Ingroup views its relations with a particular Outgroup (e.g., a shift from viewing Europe as an enemy to a partner), and changes in the relative distribution of proposals across a population (e.g., a shift from high support for a “Western” proposal to high support for an “Eastern” proposal). Ibid., 22.

<sup>314</sup> Cantir & Kaarbo, 2016, 177.

<sup>315</sup> Özdamar, 2016.

<sup>316</sup> Beneš, V., & Harnisch, S. (2015). Role theory in symbolic interactionism: Czech Republic, Germany and the EU. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50(1), 147.

<sup>317</sup> About this topic, see the comprehensive discussion offered by Brettell, C. B. (2002). The individual/agent and culture/structure in the history of the social sciences. *Social Science History*, 26(3), 429-445.

*constraints, and interests.* Therefore, relying on FPA allows the adoption of the so-called “decision units framework,” which integrates several strands of research in its approach to opening the black box of foreign policy decision-making. In other words, it helps to examine domestic political agents, divisions, and decision-making processes within regimes.<sup>318</sup>

These approaches mirror the classic three levels of analysis in FPA, focusing on the role of the individual leader, the place of state institutions, and the influence of system factors in their assessment of foreign policy decision-making in the domestic environment.<sup>319</sup> Decision units can change across a single policy and across time. The framework acts as a theory selector – different decision units and different key characteristics of those units point analysts to middle-range theories (e.g., bureaucratic politics, groupthink, or coalition formation). As such, the policymaking process constitutes a distinct level of FPA, which captures the “aggregation function” of the multiple societal inputs, *ceteris paribus* systemic constraints.<sup>320</sup> The aggregation function presumes an authoritative decision unit – an individual or a group of individuals with the capability and authority to make decisions and allocate a society’s resources on foreign policy issues.<sup>321</sup> The form and characteristics of each unit and its ability to bring about foreign policy changes vary based on the existing political and institutional structures.<sup>322</sup> As noted by Blavoukos and Bourantonis, in general, autonomy and insulation of the unit from political dependencies (i.e., the Army, veto power actors, electoral concerns, coalition partners, etc.) create a policymaking environment more conducive to change. In a regime, foreign policy change is more likely to occur in cases of strong, single-party governments with a Prime Minister dominating decision-making in the Cabinet, few or no veto points (by a President, Constitutional Court, or other), and small societal involvement or interest.<sup>323</sup>

FPA generally argues that the focus on the individual decision-maker can be excessively narrow. This is because, even within states, foreign policy bureaucracies’ conflicting outlooks and demands clearly influence foreign policy decisions in ways that reflect the importance of parochial concerns over national interest considerations. While the executive decision-maker is a key component of the foreign policy decision-making process, it has to be recognized that any decisions made took place within the context of institutions charged explicitly with interpreting and implementing foreign and security policy for the state. The role and contribution of specialized

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<sup>318</sup> Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Hermann, M. G., & Hagan, J. D. (1998). International Decision Making: Leadership Matters. *Foreign Policy*, 110, 124.

<sup>319</sup> Alden et al., 2017, 78.

<sup>320</sup> Hagan, J. D. (2001). Does Decision Making Matter? *International Studies Review*, 3(2), 5-6.

<sup>321</sup> Hermann, 2001, 47-48, 57-64.

<sup>322</sup> These structures include the number of formal and/or informal veto points, political opposition, the extent of societal involvement, the electoral system, and the policymaking style of the leader, among other factors. See, for example, Koivula, T., & Sipilä, J. (2011). Missing in action? EU crisis management and the link to the domestic political debate. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 46(4), 521-522.

<sup>323</sup> Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2014, 487.

ministries, departments, and agencies – supplemented by ad hoc working groups tasked with a particular foreign policy mandate – must be accounted for in FPA. For Graham Allison, Morton Halperin, and others, an analysis of foreign policy decision-making has to emphasize the interplay between leaders, bureaucratic actors, organizational culture, and, to an extent, political factors outside the formal apparatus of the state.<sup>324</sup>

Similarly, Kaarbo suggests delving into the actual governing structures and examining the role of bureaucracies – especially of minority dissenters to the prevailing policy choices – in the foreign policy process. Accordingly, the ability of these bureaucratic minorities to influence foreign policy is based on their familiarity with and consequent facility at manipulating the decision-making procedures and information within governing structures.<sup>325</sup> Therefore, this study applies the category of *intra-elite bureaucratic politics*, which argues that the leader usually makes the decisions. Still, other interested actors do try to influence him, such as presidential advisers, senior military and intelligence officers, key cabinet members, party apparatchiki, and foreign ministry officials. Indeed, as the “bureaucratic politics” model argues<sup>326</sup>, each actor may propose different policies shaped by their particular roles and material interests. Characteristic of the Middle East has been the dominating role of the military and intelligence services at the expense of the diplomats.<sup>327</sup> The salient role of the former, even in pluralistic cases like Turkey, the relative weakness and limited professionalism of most foreign ministries may bias policy toward coercive options and prioritize “national security” issues over others. Therefore, other than the traditional platforms of TFP making – like Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and National Intelligence Organization (*Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) – this thesis takes into account the role of other institutional players – the Presidential cabinet, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), the Directorate of Communications (*İletişim Başkanlığı*) – as well as associations closer to the government or the state like TÜSİAD (Turkish Industry and Business Association, *Türk Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği*) and MÜSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association, *Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*) or cultural centers like the Yunus Emre Institutes (YEE) and the Maarif Foundation.

Regarding foreign policy change, the literature supports the study of these entities to understand the complexity of decision-making processes. First, they can work as “advocacy groups”

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<sup>324</sup> Allison, G. T., & Halperin, M. H. (1972). Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications. *World Politics*, 24(S1), 40–79. Rochester, J. M. (1978). The Paradigm Debate in International Relations and Its Implications for Foreign Policy Making: Toward a Redefinition of the “National Interest.” *The Western Political Quarterly*, 31(1), 56.

<sup>325</sup> Kaarbo, J. (1998). Power Politics in Foreign Policy: The Influence of Bureaucratic Minorities. *European Journal of International Relations*, 4(1), 67–97.

<sup>326</sup> Idem.

<sup>327</sup> Idem.

that support an alternative foreign policy course of action.<sup>328</sup> The three groups may have overlapping membership, such as a policy entrepreneur embracing an alternative political culture, as in the case of the Islamist Movements like the National Outlook (*Millî Görüş*), the Gülen Movement (*Hizmet*) and the other cultural/political movements such as the *Nurcu* and *Nakşibendi* brotherhoods. The general proposition is that the stronger these groups emerge in the domestic political arena regarding membership, voice, and potential influence over policy outcomes (or the more easily their objections are accommodated), the more probable foreign policy change becomes. Similarly, socio-economic groups with alternative preferences may also advocate foreign policy change. “Capturing” the state and following a specific foreign policy path is crucial for domestic socio-economic actors to preserve and enhance their relative power and status. Therefore, changes in the domestic political contours, following the ascendance of new societal forces, may bring about substantial foreign policy re-orientation.

Another element to take into account is the *influence of public opinion*. In foreign policymaking, its role stems from the assumption that rational political actors in democratic regimes function under the imperative of acquiring or retaining power.<sup>329</sup> However, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that also in authoritarian or hybrid regimes like Turkey, a significant determinant of public opinion depends on the size of the gap between supporters and opponents of foreign policy change, the leader’s own preferences vis-à-vis change, and their sensitivity to public opinion.<sup>330</sup>

Last, as this thesis considers changes and continuities between (and within) the Özal and Erdoğan’s eras – characterized by the central role of their brand-new parties – it is relevant to consider the latest FPA literature underlining the importance of including *political parties* as a unit of analysis.<sup>331</sup> A closer examination of political parties and foreign policy reveals that many of the determining points in the formulation of ideological orientation and particular policy choices (which sometimes appear directly contradictory to this orientation) of a state’s foreign policy are products of the decisions and inputs at the political party level and not the formal government. Moreover, focusing on political parties and foreign policy throughout their historical formation and evolution processes makes it possible to move away from the normative bias toward emphasizing democratic forms of governance and attributing unique qualities to them. Instead, this approach allows for an impartial examination of how single-party regimes function in ways that mimic these critical roles.<sup>332</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>328</sup> Idem.

<sup>329</sup> Baum & Potter, 2008.

<sup>330</sup> Mintz, A., & DeRouen Jr, K. (2010). *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press, 131-32.

<sup>331</sup> Hagan et al., 2001.

<sup>332</sup> Alden et al., 2017, 81.

parties operating in closed (authoritarian) systems pursue foreign policies that reflect these conditions, albeit within the context of a “selectorate,” where opposing factions can leverage poor crisis management to criticize the faction in power.

### 2.3.3. The Individual Level

The importance of individuals and personalities in global politics has become a significant debate in the international relations literature over the last few decades.<sup>333</sup> Byman and Pollack called for “bringing the statesman back into the analysis,” emphasizing that “the goals, abilities, and foibles of individuals are crucial to the intentions, capabilities, and strategies of a state.”<sup>334</sup> However, the transformative power of political leadership cannot be fully understood without considering the effects of domestic politics and the international system.

Against this backdrop, Snyder highlights the need to emphasize the “definition of the situation” made by foreign policymakers themselves,<sup>335</sup> to capture the centrality of decision-makers and their subjective biases in defining, assessing, and interpreting foreign policy events. This means considering human agency, with all its defects, to be at the core of international politics. Against pure rationalist theories, this approach argues that, at best, foreign policy decision-makers operate within the framework of the information available to them and make decisions on that limited basis. Moreover, they are also subject to other influences, such as their perceptions, pre-existing beliefs or prejudices, and cognitive limitations on handling information, which introduces further distortions to the process.<sup>336</sup> One premise is that in regimes where power is personalized and concentrated – especially in times of fluidity or crisis – the leader’s personal style, values, and perceptions (or misperceptions) can make an enormous difference.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> For a discussion, see, among many, Thiers, C., & Wehner, L. E. (2022). The Personality Traits of Populist Leaders and Their Foreign Policies: Hugo Chávez and Donald Trump. *International Studies Quarterly*, 66(1), 1.

<sup>334</sup> Byman, D. L., & Pollack, K. M. (2001). Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In. *International Security*, 25(4), 109. During the Cold War, leading scholars in the field found individuals and personalities too complex to analyze, and the national and international systems were ‘taken for granted as the major categories of international political analysis’, Robert A. Isaak, The Individual in International Politics: Solving the Level-of-Analysis Problem, *Polity*, 7(2), 1974, 266.

<sup>335</sup> Snyder, M. (1983). The influence of individuals on situations: Implications for understanding the links between personality and social behavior. *Journal of Personality*, 51(3), 497–516.

<sup>336</sup> Hudson, 2005, 30; Alden et al., 2017, 25.

<sup>337</sup> Dyson, S. B., & Preston, T. (2006). Individual Characteristics of Political Leaders and the Use of Analogy in Foreign Policy Decision Making. *Political Psychology*, 27(2), 265–288; Foster, D. M., & Keller, J. W. (2014). Leaders’ Cognitive Complexity, Distrust, and the Diversionary Use of Force. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 10(3), 205–223; Dawisha, A. (1990). Arab Regimes: Legitimacy and Foreign Policy. In G. Luciani (Ed.), *The Arab state* (1st Edition). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.



First, foreign policymakers operate within the framework of what Simon calls “*bounded rationality*,”<sup>338</sup> meaning that they act rationally within the context of partial information and other limitations placed on decisions. Thus, leaders make foreign policy based on their perceptions rather than the actual operational environment. Many studies demonstrate that individual leaders draw upon a personalized understanding of history to interpret international events and elaborate appropriate responses to them.<sup>339</sup> This also suggests that foreign policy decisions are essentially the product of the “images” that individual leaders have of other countries or leaders and, therefore, are based upon stereotypes, biases, and other subjective sources that interfere with their ability to conduct rational foreign policy.<sup>340</sup> Another dimension of the psychological approach that affects foreign policy is “*cognition*,” namely the process by which humans select and process information from the world around them, which introduces significant challenges to decision-making.<sup>341</sup> Lastly, according to George, the international environment is filtered by decision-makers through their own “*operational code*,” which is a set of rules and perceptions that have previously been established within their minds and which are used to assess new situations and develop policy responses to them.<sup>342</sup> This suggests that this interrelationship between individual leaders and their environments can best be explained through the development of a “cognitive map” that combines perception, prejudice, and an understanding of “historical lessons” and applies these to the task of decision-making.<sup>343</sup>

Moreover, these parameters depend partly on the “*experience and character of the leader*.” In international politics, personalities are critical sources of “the heterogeneity of preferences, beliefs, and decision-making processes.”<sup>344</sup> This implies recognizing that different leaders bring their own biases to the office and – primarily evident in the cases of leadership change – can exercise dramatically different influences over their countries’ foreign policies.<sup>345</sup> In addition, differences in leadership recruitment systems may make a difference.<sup>346</sup> Although leadership recruitment through competitive elections is supposed to make for more accountable and, hence, more co-strained leaders,

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<sup>338</sup> Herbert Simon, cited in Hill, 2006, 1.

<sup>339</sup> Jervis, 2017.

<sup>340</sup> Boulding, K. E. (1959). National Images and International Systems. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 3(2), 120–131.

<sup>341</sup> Indeed, the constraints imposed by cognition – when combined with the role of perception – make it challenging to describe foreign policy decisions as anything other than the product of an incomplete (and therefore unsatisfactory) process. Rosati, J., & Miller, C. E. (2010). Political Psychology, Cognition, and Foreign Policy Analysis. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*.

<sup>342</sup> George, A. L. (1969). The “Operational Code”: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making. *International Studies Quarterly*, 13(2), 190–222.

<sup>343</sup> Axelrod, R. (Ed.). (2016). *Structure of Decision The Cognitive Maps of Political Elites*. Princeton University Press Two Rivers Distribution [Distributor].

<sup>344</sup> Hafner-Burton, E. M., Haggard, S., Lake, D. A., & Victor, D. G. (2017). The Behavioral Revolution and International Relations. *International Organization*, 71(S1), S4.

<sup>345</sup> Alden & Aran, 2017, 28.

<sup>346</sup> Hinnebusch & Etheshami, 2014. When leaders “climbed to power in a struggle, as in the early phases of authoritarian republics, they are often more competitive and power-hungry personalities than those who inherited a crown”

in the Middle East, democratically elected leaders are not always less bellicose. For instance, in Turkey, elected politicians like Adnan Menderes and Turgut Özal occasionally departed from the cautious policies of the career bureaucracy. Finally, because leaders and their bureaucracies tend to be too invested in existing policies, change in failing policy is most likely when an external shock is accompanied or followed by leadership change, with the new leader more willing to reinterpret the situation.<sup>347</sup> In a nutshell, degrees of cognitive openness and complexity of political leaders and entrepreneurs complement rationalist accounts of foreign policy change, focusing on how politicians internalize and respond to systemic and conjunctural changes.<sup>348</sup> These psychological underpinnings of human decision-making could be helpful in understanding how leaders interpret prospects for a new order, what lessons they learned from past orders, and how they go about making foreign policy choices based on their own beliefs, emotions, psychological needs, motivations, and limits in processing information.<sup>349</sup>

Another manifestation of personality in foreign policy is the “*leadership style*” adopted by the key foreign policy actor.<sup>350</sup> Despite valuable categorizations offered by the literature,<sup>351</sup> this thesis does not aim to assert “a final quantitative or qualitative judgment” of the leadership style but to cluster the interrelations of different processes that lead to the formation of specific behavior and policy outcomes, both in their material and immaterial forms. In relation to the concept of change, the analysis of the individual and leadership level can be conceived as how these constituencies see the world and what instruments (including unilateral or multilateral) they believe are effective, how much they believe they can control events, how complexly they think about international relations, and how they interact with others. As such, it follows Kaarbo’s suggestion: (1) leaders vary – leaders within the same political system and the same international system believe and act differently; (2) a key difference between leaders is that some respect constraints, others challenge them; (3) these

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<sup>347</sup> Ülgül, 2024.

<sup>348</sup> Gustavsson, 1998, 24.

<sup>349</sup> See, for example, Hafner-Burton et al., 2017; Jervis, 1976; Vertzberger, Y. (1993). *The world in their minds: Information processing, cognition, and perception in foreign policy decisionmaking* (Nachdr.). Stanford University Press; Yarhi-Milo, K. (2014). *Knowing the adversary: Leaders, intelligence, and assessment of intentions in international relations*. Princeton university press.

<sup>350</sup> According to Orbovich and Molnar, there are four different cognitive leadership styles: systemic (rationalist, based on cost-benefit calculations), speculative (context-oriented), judicial (task-oriented), and intuitive (relying on a non-rational approach or “hunches”). See Orbovich, C., & Molnar, R. (1992). Modeling foreign policy advisory processes. In E. Singer & V. M. Hudson (Eds.), *Political psychology and foreign policy*. Westview Pres, 202. Management of the decision-making process in foreign policy, be it seeking emotional reinforcement from an advisory group or using the group to affirm the leader’s decision through forced consensus, is a reflection of the emotional disposition of the foreign policy decision-maker. See Renshon, J., & Renshon, S. A. (2008). The Theory and Practice of Foreign Policy Decision Making. *Political Psychology*, 29(4), 509–536. Prospect theory suggests that when foreign policy decision-makers perceive their setting as one of gain, they become risk averse, seeking to hold on to their attainments. Conversely, when foreign policy decision-makers perceive themselves as operating in a loss setting, they become risk-takers, gambling on achieving gains through pursuing high-risk actions. See Smith et al., 2012.

<sup>351</sup>

differences can have profound effects on policymaking processes and foreign policy choices.<sup>352</sup> This goes together with the fact that structural factors conflate leadership and regime security, opening debates about whether, how, and under which circumstances a change in leadership affects foreign policy.<sup>353</sup>

In this sense, leadership security refers to the continuity of the specific individuals in power. Regime security, on the other hand, is a broader category that entails the stability of the dominant coalition and the rule system, even if individual leaders are overthrown. As highlighted before, research on coalitions, institutions, and elites in authoritarian regimes can help disentangle leaders from regimes.<sup>354</sup> Overall, individual-level analysis helps us explain change and creativity in international affairs while providing accountability and meaning for state actions that cannot take place without human agency.<sup>355</sup>

According to Kesgin, “Political leaders of Turkey have always controlled significant political power since Atatürk, the founder of modern-day Turkey. In fact, Turkish politics has always been “a stage for leader-based politics.”<sup>356</sup> Researchers of TFP have also contributed to the literature, especially by focusing on Özal and Erdoğan.<sup>357</sup> While recognizing the importance of these other works, the present study also aims to highlight the agency-structure interaction to integrate systemic and domestic levels of analysis as well as some of their respective different theoretical approaches. As Murat Ülgül highlights, leaders must work with existing domestic institutions while responding to the external environment in devising and implementing foreign policy in a way that foreign policy behaviors emerge after political leaders have assessed domestic and international factors.<sup>358</sup> This means discussing the determinative power of structure rather than just individual agency in the case of TFP because “[w]ithout environments that are pervious to human intervention, even the most gifted leader can make no mark.”<sup>359</sup> This does not mean excluding leadership in foreign policy analysis but

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<sup>352</sup> See, for example, Çuhadar et al., 2017; Herman & Hagan, 1998; Horowitz, M. C., & Stam, A. C. (2014). How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders. *International Organization*, 68(3), 527–559; Kaarbo, 1997; Van Esch, F., & Swinkels, M. (2015). How Europe’s Political Leaders Made Sense of the Euro Crisis: The Influence of Pressure and Personality. *West European Politics*, 38(6), 1203–1225.

<sup>353</sup> Valbjørn, M. (2017). Strategies for Reviving the International Relations/Middle East Nexus after the Arab Uprisings. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 50(03), 648.

<sup>354</sup> See, for instance, Baabood, A. (2003). Dynamics and Determinants of the GCC States’ Foreign Policy, with Special Reference to the EU. *The Review of International Affairs*, 3(2), 254–282. See also Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Hermann, 2001.

<sup>355</sup> Hudson, 2005, 3–5.

<sup>356</sup> Kesgin, 2012, 36.

<sup>357</sup> Ülgül, 2024. The Bilkent School of Political Psychology, for example, spearheaded studies to understand how Turkish political leaders reacted to domestic and international constraints when conducting foreign policy. Esra Çuhadar et al. found that in terms of personality traits, Turkish political leaders exhibited stark differences, and these differences played an important role in the foreign policy decisions they adopted. Their analysis also shows that structural limitations imposed on political leaders are no less important than personal traits in foreign policy analysis. See Çuhadar et al., 2021.

<sup>358</sup> Lobell et al., 2009, 7.

<sup>359</sup> Greenstein, F. I. (1998). The Impact of Personality on the End of the Cold War: A Counterfactual Analysis. *Political Psychology*, 19(1), 2.

demonstrating that it “is not [about] whether [individuals and personalities] are relevant, but how they are relevant in relation to how much national and international conditions allow them to matter.”<sup>360</sup> This inside-out perspective allows us to understand the physical, organizational, cultural, and situational settings that explain the success or failure of a business policy and shows that “policy reform does not take place in a historical vacuum but takes place in a particular context.”<sup>361</sup>

## 2.4. Operationalization of the Theoretical Framework

### 2.4.1. Mixed Methods and Sources

The latest FPA scholarship highly relies on using a process-tracing method (PT) as a within-case analysis to link possible causes and observed outcomes.<sup>362</sup> Process-tracing “can involve both inductive and deductive study of events and sequences within a case”.<sup>363</sup> This requires the prior definition of variables (parameters in this case) and the types all these variables constitute through all their possible configurations.”<sup>364</sup> While this thesis shares this general set-up, it also shares the argument that PT’s typical conviction that generally treats the mechanism as the entire sequence between the trigger and the outcome is too restrictive in the context of a broad timeframe. Especially for the more actor-centered and interpretivist approaches, it is too deterministic.<sup>365</sup> Stating that mechanisms underlie a bounded but regular association implies that actors, under specific conditions, will generally act similarly, leading to predictable outcomes. However, to account for agency or the influence of different parameters and actors, our methods must incorporate contingency and recognize the potential variability in outcomes.<sup>366</sup> As such, “true agency” – and therewith agential interpretations, (mis)calculations, understandings, assessments, meanings, ideas, emotions, creativity, and spontaneity – contradicts, at least in potential, regular associations.<sup>367</sup> Since agency introduces contingency, taking agency seriously means our understanding of mechanisms should

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<sup>360</sup> Kelman, H. C. (1970). The Role of the Individual in International Relations: Some Conceptual and Methodological Considerations. *Journal of International Affairs*, 24(1), 2-4.

<sup>361</sup> Holland, J. (2007). Tools for institutional, political and social analysis of policy reform: A sourcebook for development practitioners. World Bank, 33.

<sup>362</sup> Beach, D., & Pedersen, R.B. (2019). *Process-tracing methods: Foundations and guidelines*. University of Michigan Press.

<sup>363</sup> George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). Case studies and theory development in the social sciences. The MIT Press.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>365</sup> Idem.

<sup>366</sup> Goertz, G., & Mahoney, J. (2013). *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton University Press, 8.

<sup>367</sup> Beach & Pedersen, 2019.

support “multifinality” – the idea that the same mechanism can produce different outcomes even under the same structural conditions.<sup>368</sup>

In light of these considerations, this thesis relies on the “analyticist approach” proposed by Hilde van Meegdenburg.<sup>369</sup> This approach is functional because of its objective to give space for both agency and contingency and hold the assumptions of generalizability that underlay it to be too rigid.<sup>370</sup> Instead, it treats mechanisms akin to Weberian ideal types: abstract constructs adduced from multiple concrete, contextually embedded, and largely idiosyncratic instantiations.<sup>371</sup> It is important to clarify here that the researcher is following a “deductive” method that aims to test the existing hypotheses in the literature to explain the outcome better and does not attempt to establish a new explanation at this stage. In this case, we know the outcome (empirical data on TFP behavior), but the causes of this outcome are not yet clear. Numerous attempts to explain the causes have produced highly competitive and differing answers. Therefore, this thesis aims to examine these competing explanations and assess their plausibility in establishing a valid causal mechanism.

In this framework, if we consider history as an explanatory factor for the making of foreign policy, “engagement with history helps us uncover historical contingencies and gain a better understanding of the vagaries of different historical contexts.”<sup>372</sup> “Among the various tools and approaches employed to shed light on foreign policy, the “historical method has been argued to be a standard go-to means, which a significant strand of FPA [...] owes a great debt to”.<sup>373</sup> As an explanatory approach, history joins the group of explanans, that is, factors that are said to explain chosen outcomes. One author calls “pragmatic positivism”<sup>374</sup> when history can, for example, be utilized to expand the temporal scope of explanations, indeed serving as an abundant well of empirical data.<sup>375</sup> In this sense, broadening the time frame of social inquiry expands the range of experiences

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<sup>368</sup> Guzzini, S. (2017). Militarizing politics, essentializing identities: Interpretivist process tracing and the power of geopolitics. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(3), 432.

<sup>369</sup> van Meegdenburg, H. (2022). Process Tracing. In P. A. Mello & F. Ostermann, *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods* (1st ed.). Routledge.

<sup>370</sup> Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. (2019). *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*. University of Michigan Press; Bennett, A., & Checkel, J. T. (Eds.). (2015). *Process tracing: From metaphor to analytic tool*. Cambridge University Press; Mahoney, J. (2015). Process Tracing and Historical Explanation. *Security Studies*, 24(2), 200–218.

<sup>371</sup> Falleti, T. G., & Lynch, J. F. (2009). Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(9), 1143–1166; McAdam, D., Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2008). Methods for Measuring Mechanisms of Contention. *Qualitative Sociology*, 31(4), 307–331

<sup>372</sup> Møller & Skaaning 2021, 104; Ghalehdar, 2022, 445.

<sup>373</sup> Alden et al., 2017, 4; Ghalehdar, 2022, 435

<sup>374</sup> Thies, 2002, 353; Ghalehdar, 2022, 46.

<sup>375</sup> Among others, see Fioretos, O. (2011). Historical Institutionalism in International Relations. *International Organization*, 65(2), 367–399; Rixen, T., Viola, L. A., & Zürn, M. (2016). *Historical institutionalism and international relations: Explaining institutional development in world politics*. Oxford University Press.

available for study. This expansion increases the volume of data accessible and introduces greater diversity in outcomes.

A historically informed approach also sensitizes researchers to temporal boundaries or period effects concerning claims about causal relationships. This means that any scholar who merely discusses these contemporary struggles without awareness of the history that shaped the terrain of preferences and actors will miss much of the central causal relevance to explaining politics and policymaking today. In this sense, Historical institutionalists also employ timing and sequence arguments to focus on *conjunctures* – interaction effects between distinct causal sequences that become joined at particular points in time.<sup>376</sup> Historical institutionalists investigate the origins, influence, and durability or fragility of complete institutional setups. Therefore, the lasting impacts of institutional decisions should often be viewed as outcomes resulting from social processes rather than as straightforward realizations of actors' goals.<sup>377</sup> In this sense, avoiding a unidirectional quest for a causal argument in favor of an established correlation within a strong argument, this logic is primarily attentive to the causal detail for each step.<sup>378</sup> Therefore, this involves not just detailed examinations of the material but also weighing the emerging evidence from different theories so that a holistic observation (comprising unit-level inspections) must consider hybrid methods to get through the high degree of abstraction affecting previous assessments around TFP. In this sense, building upon a mid-level theoretical basis, the idea is not to use historical institutionalism to “look at the past” but also to study processes over time because “without the kind of attentiveness to a temporally specified process, important outcomes may go unobserved, causal relationships may be misunderstood, and valuable hypotheses may never receive consideration.”<sup>379</sup> As Roberts puts it, historical researchers “explain [outcomes] by tracing the sequence of events that brought them about.”<sup>380</sup> This kind of sequential analysis often identifies “critical junctures” when certain choices or events occur that set countries (or other units of analysis) down long-run trajectories of change.<sup>381</sup> It puts attention to “path-dependent” processes of change and gives causal weight to the ordering of events within the sequence.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007.

<sup>377</sup> Collier, D. (2011). Teaching process tracing: exercises and examples. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 44(4), 823-830.

<sup>378</sup> Hancké, B. (2009). *Intelligent research design: A guide for beginning researchers in the social sciences*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>379</sup> Pierson, & Skocpol, 2002.

<sup>380</sup> Roberts, 1997, 16.

<sup>381</sup> Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Soifer, H. D. (2012). The Causal Logic of Critical Junctures. *Comparative Political Studies*, 45(12), 1572–1597; Collier, R. B., & Collier, D. (1991). *Shaping the Political Arena. Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>382</sup> Soifer, 2012.

While recognizing the importance of the turn in recent IR scholarship in acknowledging domestic variables, the original approach of this thesis goes beyond a hierarchical understanding. It underscores the intricate interplay of domestic and international dynamics, exploring lines of continuity and change within different periods and governments in office. Incorporating parameters at different levels rather than hierarchical variables further deepens the analysis, emphasizing how different elements might equally contribute to influencing and constraining Turkey's behavior over time. In essence, weaving FPA theories with historical insights, this approach provides a comprehensive framework for deciphering the parameters of change in Turkish Foreign Policy. By exploring the adaptive nature of Turkish leaders, the historical depth, and the dynamic interaction of domestic and international parameters, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the evolution of the TFP trajectory and its drivers and mechanisms. The emphasis on lines of continuity and change along and within different historical periods enriches the analysis, thoroughly exploring the complexities inherent in the broader Turkish sociopolitical milieu.

With this consideration in mind, this project relies on a qualitative methodology. In its first phase, the “scaffolding” of the analysis has been built on secondary sources, such as academic literature, think tank reports, and thematic dossiers from various institutions. This constitutes the basis for scrutinizing rival theoretical lines, synthesizing the most valuable accounts and terminological references, and building upon a solid historical and empirical background. In addition, inspecting some specific (sub)topics and elements substantiated extensive conception of levels of analysis by looking at Turkey's “*areas of interest*”<sup>383</sup>, namely surveying those issues influencing (and influenced by) the inside-out (external-internal) intersections in TFP. Other than supporting the main arguments by searching for different empirical manifestations, areas of interest are reliable in terms of descriptive studies that could operate by comparisons and search for common trends. For instance, looking at specific issues helps emphasize the domestic-international connection, Turkish leadership's peculiar pendulum between ideology and pragmatism, and the variations between pro-activeness and re-activeness in different times and institutional settings.

Apart from secondary sources, important primary evidence was collected through interviews.<sup>384</sup> Examining these data through a deductive approach<sup>385</sup> helped examine the value of the different explanations and assess their demanding standards to establish causation in this issue-

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<sup>383</sup> Nonneman, G. (Ed.). (2005). *Analyzing Middle East foreign policies: The relationship with Europe* (1. publ). Routledge.

<sup>384</sup> King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications.

<sup>385</sup> Tansey, O. (2007). Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-probability Sampling. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 40(4), 765–772.

oriented study. Subsequently, a great time of this research was dedicated to collecting primary resources thanks to a two-year-long fieldwork in Turkey. First, visiting and being part of specific universities and fora – mainly but not exclusively in Turkey – established or widened valuable contacts with individuals and institutions of different backgrounds, from which to draw a brand-new personal database. Previous personal academic and institutional experiences and research in the country, combined with the continuous implementation of rudiments of the Turkish language, facilitated these procedures. In order to overcome eventual impediments and biases in collecting data, an effective procedure was represented by the “snowball sampling” link-tracing<sup>386</sup> – a convenience non-probabilistic sampling mechanism that operates in many hard-to-reach populations.<sup>387</sup> In this outline, a major role was represented by more than sixty semi-structured interviews, especially elite interviewing, which proved to be highly relevant. This was done with the belief that in the case of social science research on foreign policy in the broadest sense, qualitative interviews correspond to two primary uses: getting first-hand information to the extent that most of the time, the researcher does not have extensive access to internal documents; having interesting access to the actors in a research context where secrecy and a specific language often constitute an issue for the analyst.<sup>388</sup> Particularly, this involves the analysis of political developments at the highest level of government, and elite actors are usually critical sources of information about the political processes of interest.<sup>389</sup> The choice of using semi-structured interviews lies within the advantage that this interview style allows more flexibility for the interviewee and the researcher to elaborate further on the topics and questions covered in this thesis.<sup>390</sup> Moreover, a semi-structured interview helps ensure that participants do not go out of line and drift away from the initial topic. Other advantages contrast the particular weaknesses of archival documents, as interviews can compensate for the lack and limitations of documentary evidence.<sup>391</sup> By presenting the official version of events, documents often conceal the informal processes and considerations that preceded decision-making.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Handcock, M. S., & Gile, K. J. (2011). Comment: On the Concept of Snowball Sampling. *Sociological Methodology*, 41(1), 367–371.

<sup>387</sup> Gile, K. J., & Handcock, M. S. (2010). Respondent-Driven Sampling: An Assessment of Current Methodology. *Sociological Methodology*, 40(1), 285–327. It implies “collecting a sample from a population in which a standard approach is either impossible or prohibitively expensive”<sup>387</sup> to approximate a probability sample over time where the seeds could be selected based on a spatial frame. See Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 10(2), 141–163.

<sup>388</sup> Idem.

<sup>389</sup> Tansey, 2007..

<sup>390</sup> Horton, J., Macve, R., & Struyven, G. (2004). Qualitative Research: Experiences in Using Semi-Structured Interviews. In *The Real Life Guide to Accounting Research* (pp. 339–357). Elsevier.

<sup>391</sup> Davies, P. H. (2001). Spies as informants: triangulation and the interpretation of elite interview data in the study of the intelligence and security services. *Politics*, 21(1), 73–80.

<sup>392</sup> George, & Bennett, 2005, 103.



If the aim is not to make generalizations from the sample to the population, then non-probability sampling can be assessed using a separate set of criteria, and considerations of the relationship between the sample and population become much less important.<sup>393</sup> For the sake of clarity, the author of this thesis decided to keep all the interviewees' names anonymous. This was decided taking into account that researching elites, people holding visible positions, or people feeling at risk in specific contexts requires particular strategies with a particular focus on the positionality of elites and the researcher. The elite researcher is thus placed in a dilemma: "how to both account for the context of each case and complex power relations and at the same time avoid offending individuals in powerful positions, who presumably have a lot to lose."<sup>394</sup> Therefore, for ethical, confidentiality, and safety reasons, the author provided the interviewees with a choice about the level of anonymity. In some cases, "hard anonymity" was explicitly asked by the interviewees. In others, the respondents did not ask for complete anonymity as a necessity but highlighted that "soft anonymity" would be preferred to "feel freer when talking" or "not to have to remark 'off the records requests' too often." As such, the final choice of the author has been to operate on different grades of anonymity according to academic ethical standards and the University's ethical norms.<sup>395</sup>

The interview data analysis method involved coding, decoding, and categorizing to accurately apply the data within the relevant themes discussed in the chapters. First, the interview data were highlighted and distinctively coded (also known as indexing or thematic coding).<sup>396</sup> The codes and their related data were then divided into groups or sections, with some representing the main topics and others listed under additional issues. This process allowed the researcher to transition from having an extensive list of codes to creating lists of categories with related codes and divisions. The categories were revised multiple times and underwent modifications. The final categories were then labeled, which included analyzing the connections between these categories. Ultimately, central concepts reflecting the meaning attached to the data were identified. This process helped interpret results and identify key meanings central to the research analysis.

Nonetheless, when one intends to trace the roots of a specific issue, "interviews and observation are not always adequate sources, as events might go way beyond what contemporary individuals can actually know or remember."<sup>397</sup> Archives are therefore still necessary to reconstruct

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<sup>393</sup> Judd, C. M., Smith, E. R., & Kidder, L. H. (1991). *Research methods in social relations* Fort Worth, Tex.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

<sup>394</sup> (Ellersgaard, C. H., Ditlevsen, K., & Larsen, A. G. (2022). Say my name? Anonymity or not in elite interviewing. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 25(5), 673–686.

<sup>395</sup> Tilley, L., & Woodthorpe, K. (2011). Is it the end for anonymity as we know it? A critical examination of the ethical principle of anonymity in the context of 21st century demands on the qualitative researcher. *Qualitative Research*, 11(2), 197–212.

<sup>396</sup> See Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (2013). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies* (10. pr). Sage.

<sup>397</sup> Badache, F., Kimber, L., & Maertens, L. (Eds.). (2023). *International Organizations and Research Methods: An Introduction*. University of Michigan Press, 268.

the genesis of the problem under study.<sup>398</sup> Therefore, the present study parallelly relied on historical methods to operate a diachronic subdivision of official documents, newspapers, and different sorts of archives, which serve to trace the patterns of change and continuity both in Turkey's strategic mindset and in the outside-in perception of TFP developments from the early post-imperial "syndrome" to the more recent revision of paradigms. Moreover, in order to claim any "turning point," there is a need to be able to document a "before" and an "after" without considering that these categories are self-evident and mere chronological attributes. The more documented these historical periods are, the less exposed the researcher is to the criticism of restrictive case selection. Finally, relying upon archives and previous observations of specific situations is also a good way to assert the legitimacy of the researcher, especially when facing interviewees who are reluctant to use social sciences methods of investigation and try to dismiss some findings as irrelevant or anecdotal.<sup>399</sup> In the words of Anne Kerstin Friedrich, "By choosing an FPA approach, archival research is not focused on explanation or tracing of events itself, but on tracing intra-ministerial decision-making processes by analyzing archival documents of foreign ministries or other institutions."<sup>400</sup> By combining archival research with the study of practices, the method can be located in the agent-oriented and behavioralist understanding of foreign policy.<sup>401</sup>

To put it more bluntly: "Interviews started where archives stopped."<sup>402</sup> Based on archive analysis, the resilience or, on the contrary, the conjunctural character of debates around TFP long-term pillars were tested. This combination enabled this research to assert that the debate on the drivers (or parameters) of TFP is a century-old debate (continuity) but that its politicization and intensity differed according to specific and changing sociohistorical contexts (change). The methodology selected for this project aims to "generate and analyze data on the causal mechanisms, or processes,

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<sup>398</sup> Larson, D. W. (2017). Archival Research in Foreign Policy. In D. W. Larson, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>399</sup> In the case of this research, the main archives were: The Turkish Diplomatic Archives (in person and through the online system at <https://www.devletarsivleri.gov.tr/>); the statements and documents published by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, TBMM), the website of Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye (*T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı*), the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı*); the statements from the website of The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications (*T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı*). For newspapers, most of the digitalized and/or authentic copies were consulted on each online archive and at the archives of the SALT Museum and Universities in Istanbul and Ankara. The memoirs of former politicians and diplomats were retrieved from either collective books and biographies or pieces published in different publications for the Centenary of the Turkish Republic (some of them on the website of the Center for Strategic Research Center of the MFA (*Dışişleri Bakanlığı Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi*, SAM). Other statistical data and non-periodical publications were found on the websites of, among others, International Organizations, other countries' diplomatic archives (mainly US and UK), the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) and the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerini Güçlendirme Vakfı*). Professionals and scholars were asked for help with the translation of the most difficult parts.

<sup>400</sup> Friedrich, A. K. (2022). Archival Research. In P. A. Mello & F. Ostermann, *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods* (1st ed.). Routledge, 464.

<sup>401</sup> Hudson, 2005.

<sup>402</sup> Tureby, M. T. (2013). To Hear with the Collection: The contextualisation and recontextualisation of archived interviews. *Oral History (Colchester)*, 41(2), 64. See also Bloch, M., Putnam, P., & Bloch, M. (2002). *The historian's craft* (Repr). Manchester Univ. Press.

events, actions, expectations, and other intervening factors, that link putative causes to observed effects.”<sup>403</sup> This makes the choice of the specific case of analysis of TFP coherent with the fact that a case consists of a certain foreign policy in a certain community in a certain period. In addition to a specific research question, a well-defined and time-constrained focus is necessary to achieve the highest possible explanatory value.<sup>404</sup>

For this reason, it is incumbent upon researchers, where possible, to go beyond secondary historical sources to do so. Only by engaging the primary source evidence can one truly evaluate the conclusions reached by historians and others on an evidentiary basis and make credible judgments about their plausibility. The best way for a researcher of foreign policy to be certain to understand the reasons why state decision-makers took the policies that they did, therefore, is to consult primary sources – such as government documents, memoirs, speeches, decision-maker interviews, and oral histories – in addition to secondary sources, taking advantage of the fact that it is much easier in our digitalized era. Of course, studying Turkish politics means dealing with the issue of “studying closed societies,” which do not publish or even allow reliable access to government documents. While interviews helped to supplement this lack of access to government archives, two typically historical methods further contributed: consulting documentary materials made available by outside sources and consulting the archives of governments that interacted with these states to gain third-party insight into TFP dynamics. Moreover, diplomatic memoirs and memos helped to see what primary sources indicate about the scholarly debates and the researcher’s essential research questions that might remain unaddressed or inadequately addressed by the secondary literature.

Finally, the centennial anniversary of the Turkish Republic in 2023 represented a “timely coincidence.” Many institutions – like the MFA, the Türkiye Directorate of Communications, and the government-affiliated think tanks – released publications about the history of TFP, including first-hand documents, declarations, and historical anecdotes.<sup>405</sup> Therefore, while the legislation on the opening of archives prevents access to what concerns the latest developments, these publications probably represented a novelty for studies on Turkey combining interviews with archival research. Indeed, archive analysis relates to the examination of two main kinds of sources: the consultation of documents (physical or online) stored by and within the archive department of the organization under

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<sup>403</sup> Bennett, A., & George, A. L. (1997). Process Tracing in Case Study Research. *MacArthur Foundation Workshop on Case Study Method*. While process tracing can be useful to improve upon simple correlations by searching for multiple congruence over time—or evidence of correlation between the hypothesized IV and the DV at different temporal points of the case study—in effect to cumulate observations of correlation within the same case, its real value added is to uncover evidence of causation, as we discuss below. See Van Evera, S. (1997). *Guide to methods for students of political science*. Cornell University Press.

<sup>404</sup> Elman, C., & Elman, M. F. (1997). Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Difference and Crossing Boundaries. *International Security*, 22(1), 5–21.

<sup>405</sup> For an overview, see <http://diad.mfa.gov.tr/default.tr.mfa>

study (if existent), but also “self-constituted” archives, meaning documents related to past events that are not necessarily considered worthy of attention by the institution and thus not stored within precise clusters by professionals.<sup>406</sup>

Overall, these methods satisfy the “simple technique of data triangulation,” which makes sure that even in “soft” settings of data-gathering, where a lot relies on subjective understanding on both sides of the interview, validity, reliability, and replicability meet minimum standards<sup>407</sup>, to corroborate those findings with empirical material or data that measure the same thing from alternative, public sources, or the implications of personal fieldwork.<sup>408</sup>

## **2.4.2. Contributions and Limitations**

As mentioned above, the main scope of the thesis is to overcome rigid theoretical boundaries to provide a comprehensive study that includes a broader array of parameters for the analysis of long-term and within-case changes in TFP. In other words, the aim is not to build a theory but rather to construct and employ a theoretically informed framework for an empirical analysis of TFP that tries to expand, complement, and update what other similar studies have done. As such, though not the principal scope, one “side-contribution” to the literature on this issue is of a theoretical nature. Since this work does not aim to discard any theoretical contribution to the study of foreign policy in a broad sense, the utilization of a multidisciplinary and multilayered approach could push further two aspects: one is the acceptance of different levels of analysis within the IR and FPA scholarship; another one is the search for a complementary dialogue between various disciplines and branches of IR, PS, and History. A second contribution is more of an empirical nature. Since both global and regional dynamics and Turkey’s political subtleties have been pacing up their process of change, this work seeks to make sense of the different interpretations made by scholars, observers, and policymakers in relation to an evolving phenomenon like TFP. Indeed, as highlighted in the literature review, studies on the matter are certainly abundant. However, a broader and more comprehensive work considering the latest evolutions (until 2024), as well as their connection with a deeper historical path (since the 1980s), does not seem to exist to date. This thesis’s additional value and potential contribution is that

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<sup>406</sup> Many scholars support the use of this mix method approach and recognize that these type of sources can be collected during fieldwork or shared by private actors during the research process. While only the former might be officially stamped as archives, the latter also deserves our attention as such sources will be examined and used similarly to official archives. See Tureby, M. T. (2013). To hear with the collection: the contextualization and recontextualization of archived interviews. *Oral history*, 63-74.

<sup>407</sup> Hancké, 2009.

<sup>408</sup> Adcock, R., & Collier, D. (2001). Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research. *American political science review*, 95(3), 529-546.

it goes beyond simple categorizations of TFP drivers by establishing causal chains that lead to certain foreign policy decisions. While other similar works on TFP merely identify either domestic or systemic drivers in a more rigid way, this multidisciplinary approach looks at different parameters in a non-hierarchical way. Therefore, this allows us to look at TFP as a phenomenon subject to varying shades of change according to elements like critical junctures, actors, culture, and perceptions instead of simple categories like “shift” or “continuity.” Certainly, this implies that the identified relationships between the parameters may only sometimes be so definite as to argue for direct or specific causation. However, the correlations deduced in such illustrations remain valuable, given that they offer significant insights into each parameter and its relationship with others.<sup>409</sup>

At the same time, some limitations need to be recognized. A methodological limitation may concern the Turkish language barrier and the limited access to elite interviewees due to the socially and politically busy period the country was going through during the research and possibly the reluctance of politicians to expose their views and ideas. Seemingly, preserving the anonymity of the interviewee is a “double-edged sword”. On the one hand, it allows to make the interviewees safer and more free during the conversations. On the other hand, this comes with the risk of appearing “biased in the eyes of the reader” and “less solid in substantiating arguments where clarifying the exact role and personality of the respondent would increase the relevance of collected data.”<sup>410</sup>

However, the author’s connections and previous experiences in the country allowed to minimize the difficulties linked to such barriers. First, archival and secondary sources-based research in Turkish archives helped to counterbalance some impediments. While some short documents could be translated autonomously with the personal rudiments of the language, more complex ones were surveyed with the help of native speakers (sometimes after a primary reading with technological instruments). Moreover, much of the material was already collected for other parallel research, like the author’s M.A. thesis and other scientific papers and works delivered and/or published during the PhD period. In addition, the richness of Turkish sources in English and the extensive body of literature produced by Turkish academics and politicians compensated to a satisfactory degree. Second, while many non-Turkish researchers lament the lack of interviews from political personalities, specifically AKP politicians or people close to the government, the political vivacity of the “Centennial” period, the 2023 Presidential elections, and the municipal ones in 2024 that accompanied this research might be the reason why many figures from various backgrounds accepted to participate in deep interviews.

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<sup>409</sup> A similar approach is adopted by Tziarras, 2014, 18.

<sup>410</sup> For a discussion, see Ellersgaard et al., 2022, 3; Lancaster, K. (2017). Confidentiality, anonymity and power relations in elite interviewing: Conducting qualitative policy research in a politicised domain. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(1), 93–103.

Of course, what remains is the fact that while various societal actors within a state might express numerous opinions, these perspectives may not align with those of the principal decision-makers or their reasoning behind policy choices. Identifying whose views are influential involves determining the members and structure of the Foreign Policy Executive (FPE), recognizing the policymakers who play a crucial role in shaping foreign policy and making decisions, and assessing the power and influence of different actors within the FPE. It is important to note that although many individuals inside and outside the government have a vested interest in foreign policy and voice their opinions, not all of them contribute significantly to the policymaking process, nor do they necessarily understand the real motivations behind the policies adopted. Additionally, for researchers, the challenge is compounded by the fact that the composition of the FPE can vary across different states and change within a state over time.<sup>411</sup> To determine the boundaries of the FPE, the researcher must consult secondary sources on foreign policymaking in the state in question during the period under investigation to assess, *a priori* and deductively, the positions and actors whom one would expect to be part of a central foreign policy decision-making inner circle. In authoritarian states, it is more difficult to ascertain where decisions are made, as members of the legislature and cabinet ministers are often figureheads or have limited influence. In this instance, the researcher should examine decision-makers who are close to the top level. There is likely to be variation across different types of authoritarian regimes. In so-called personalist or strongman dictatorships, however, the membership of the FPE is highly idiosyncratic<sup>412</sup>.

In this regard, while conducting a detailed case analysis of the specific issue, the elaboration of this thesis needed to adjust some initial assessments of key influencers. One was the “dog that does not bark” scenario, where an individual expected to be influential, based on his governmental or cabinet position, has little or no impact on decision-making, as revealed by archival research and interviews. The second scenario was the “mouse that roared,” where individuals not initially presumed to be influential due to their governmental role actually wield significant influence over policy. This included a member of the opposition party, someone in a minor cabinet position, a close confidant of the leader, or a person who maintained a low profile or secrecy about their role after leaving the government. Moreover, the choice of not relying on specific case studies can also be seen as a limitation. However, it is essential to recall that if the scope is not to construct or test a theory, selectivity is one of the risks that a researcher should undertake in determining the ranges within

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<sup>411</sup> Ripsman et al., 2016.

<sup>412</sup> On the characteristics of “personalist” (or strongman) regimes versus the characteristics of juntas and “non-personalist machine regimes,” see Weeks, 2014.

which analysis should be performed. In this regard, the conclusive remarks will assess which aspects, regional case studies, and political personalities could be included and further explored.

Lastly, as the author is mainly affiliated with Italian academia, a significant aim behind this work is also to pave the way for the creation – or the expansion – of a branch of studies dedicated to Turkey's contemporary sociopolitical dynamics based on its specificities and peculiarities.

|            | LEVELS                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                          |                                               |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| PARAMETERS | EXTERNAL LEVEL                                                                                                                                                         | INTERNAL LEVEL                                                                                                                                           | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL                              |
|            | <b>International Parameters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Polarity: Restrictive or Permissive Environment</li> <li>b. Patterns of Alliances</li> </ul> | <b>Institutional Parameters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Civil-military relations</li> <li>b. elite-public opinion relations</li> </ul> | <b>Bounded Rationality Parameters</b>         |
|            | <b>Regional Parameters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Threats and Opportunities</li> <li>b. The Actions of Other Regional States and Actors</li> </ul>  | <b>Immaterial Parameters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ideology</li> <li>b. Religion</li> <li>c. Culture</li> </ul>                      | <b>Experience and Character of the Leader</b> |
|            | <b>External Projection Parameters:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Foreign Policy Capabilities and Foreign Policy Instruments</li> </ul>                 | <b>Decision-making Parameters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Process</li> <li>b. Agents</li> </ul>                                        | <b>Leadership Style Parameters</b>            |

Table 1. List of Parameters







## **PART 2: A PRELUDE TO CHANGE IN TFP**

### **3. THE POST-COUP ERA AND THE ORIGINS OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL ACTIVISM**

#### **3.1. The External Level**

##### **3.1.1. The Cold War and Critical Regional Conjunctures**

Despite different theoretical understandings, one can safely recognize that the main difference the Cold War period brought to the international order was the alteration in the nature of the system's polarity and, consequently, of global politics. As many scholars agree, with the end of the Second World War, the international system became bipolar after centuries-long multipolarity.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the post-1945 global order consisted for a long time of two poles – the USA and the USSR. The former represented the largest economy and an indisputable military power. In contrast, although not a totally industrialized country based on agricultural production, the latter had immense territory, vast natural resources, and a considerable land army. Compared with these two powers, European states had a long time recovering from significant loss of human and economic resources after the Second World War. In this bipolar system, the international system was dominated by two major powers that were formidable rivals in many respects. Moreover, these poles created zones of influence that only two powerful states could cope with, while the other states had to “choose camps” to preserve or maximize their interests.<sup>2</sup> During the Cold War's bipolar systemic structure and under the immense pressure of intense nuclear and conventional military competition, states shaped their relationships based on their security needs and concerns. Foreign policies were aligned with the conditions of the two opposing alliances that naturally emerged from this polarized system. The Cold War influenced not only political relations in global politics but also economic and social connections, which developed in

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<sup>1</sup> Wohlforth, 2022; Ehteshami, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> For a critical appraisal, see Kalinovsky, A. M., & Daigle, C. (Eds.). (2014). *The Routledge handbook of the Cold War*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

response to the extreme division between the two blocs.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, in an atmosphere of uncertainty, foreign policy decisions were often reactive to the political or military actions of the opposing pole or preemptive measures to limit potential moves by the rival. At the same time, competition between the superpowers mostly restrained from engaging in serious armed conflicts, not only in their own orbits but also in their outer regions of influence. However, in this situation, other regional powers and less powerful states played the role of proxies, security bastions, or trustable allies of the US or the USSR.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding Turkey, the first chapter has highlighted how this shift in the international system at the end of the multipolar world forced the country to adapt its foreign policy to the new bipolar conditions. Historically, Turkey sought security through cooperation and alliances with regional powers. However, Ankara needed to align with the great powers during and following the Second World War. Turkey opted to ally with the US and, more broadly, the Western bloc to counter the USSR, its historically contentious neighbor. As a result of its alliance with the Western latter, Turkey secured a stable position in the international arena to some extent.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this alliance also made Turkey more dependent on its partners in terms of foreign policy. Consequently, in this period, TFP options were limited due to the constraints imposed by the bipolar international system. At the same time, as this section tries to unpack, developments on the international level profoundly impacted all the regional issues that involved Turkey's interests and security. Contrary to the previous decades, this period is defined as the first in which Ankara began to develop a more "equilibristic" foreign policy that, even without disputing its adherence to the Western camp, would search for more margins of maneuver to differentiate its external relations, sustain domestic demands for economic and political stability, and nourish its economic and trade volumes towards expanded geographical areas.

The first external event that stimulated some changes in TFP was the 1979 Revolution in Iran. As the US lost Iran as a crucial ally in the region, Turkey's strategic importance became more evident. With the revolution and ideological shift towards Islamism, Iran almost became the "antithesis of Turkey" in the eyes of Western countries. In early 1980, the Carter Administration requested that US allies suspend diplomatic and economic relations with Iran. However, due to its dependency on Iranian oil, Turkey refrained from imposing sanctions on Iran. Additionally, Ankara denied the US

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<sup>3</sup> Holm, H.-H., & Sørensen, G. (2019). Introduction: What Has Changed? In H.-H. Holm & G. Sørensen, *Whose World Order?* (1st ed., pp. 1–17). Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Wohlforth, 2022; Ehteshami, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> On the period, see Athanassopoulou, E. (1996). Western defence developments and Turkey's search for security in 1948. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32(2), 77–108; Aydın, 2000; Yilmaz, & Bilgin, 2005, 39.

permission to use the Incirlik Air Base for a rescue operation for the hostages at the US embassy in Tehran. Instead, Turkey offered to mediate the crisis, but the US did not support this initiative and began questioning Turkey's reliability as an ally.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, worried about a repetition of the US's harsh stance and a subsequent "abandonment" like after the Cyprus issue in 1974, Turkey sought to adopt a more cautious and midway approach towards Iran.<sup>7</sup> In 1979, as Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit had negative views about the Shah's regime but opposed any foreign intervention, the Turkish government recognized the new Iranian regime. At the same time, however, Turkey was concerned that ongoing internal instability in Iran could lead to Soviet intervention, as had occurred in the 1920s and after 1945. By November 1979, there were signs of deteriorating relations with Teheran. When the Hostage Crisis occurred and Süleyman Demirel came to power in Turkey, Ankara condemned the occupation of the US embassy in Tehran as "a rare and inhuman action in history," to which Khomeini responded by stating that the Ankara government, like the toppled Shah regime, survived "only with the help of bayonets."<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, the following Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) compelled Turkey to avoid further straining its relations to prioritize regional stability and safeguard its economic interests. Indeed, Turkey and Iran recognized the need for mutual support during this period, which motivated improved bilateral relations, reaching US\$ 2 billion by 1985.<sup>9</sup> For Turkey, Iran was a vital oil supplier and a market for its exports, while for the latter, the former was a neutral country providing a crucial corridor for survival. Yet, assuming this position was not comfortable for Turkey. First, Iran's support for the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq and then PKK-affiliated militias in the region, which began terrorist attacks against Turkey in 1984, was troubling. The PKK had safe havens in northern Iraq near the Turkish border. In response to this common threat, Turkey and Iraq signed a treaty in 1984 allowing Turkey to conduct hot pursuit operations against terrorist groups within Iraqi territory. Turkey's attempt to secure a similar agreement with Teheran encountered the Iranian leadership's refusal based on the claim that the Turkey-Iraq agreement violated neutrality principles as it would strengthen the Baghdad government. The second concern was the conduct of the Iran-Iraq war, particularly regarding the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık pipeline and the railway connecting Turkey and Iran, which could become strategic targets for Turkey's trade.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Aydın, M., & Erhan, Ç. (Eds.). (2004). *Turkish-American relations: Past, present and future*. Psychology Press, pp. 714-715.

<sup>7</sup> About Turkish-Iranian relations, see Gasparetto, A. (2018). Iranian-Turkish Relations in a Changing Middle East. *International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, 21(1), 83-98; S. Güliden Ayman. (2014). Turkey and Iran: Between Friendly Competition and Fierce Rivalry. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 36(1); Akbarzadeh, S., & Barry, J. (2017). Iran and Turkey: Not quite enemies but less than friends. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(4), 980-995.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, C. S. (2007). Turkey in the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003. *Turkish Studies*, 8(1), 85-119.

<sup>9</sup> Çetinsaya, G. (2008). The New Middle East, Turkey and the Search for Regional Stability. 85-96.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, 2007.

Another concurrent significant development was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The most important aspect is that despite occasional bilateral issues with the US, this event underscored the importance of NATO as a security source for both Turkish elites and public opinion. Moreover, it once again highlighted the potential threat the Soviets posed to neighboring states, significantly weaker ones. Although it was unlikely that Turkey's leaders believed the Soviet Union was on the verge of invading the country, the invasion of Afghanistan significantly undermined arguments for detachment from NATO in domestic political debates.<sup>11</sup> This invasion demonstrated the potential consequences for a relatively weak nation bordering the USSR in case of neutrality, suggesting that even as the perceived threat to the Middle East diminished during the 1980s, the concerns about the USSR remained vivid. This overlapped with the fact that, in Turkey, conservative realism and concerns about threats from emerging left-wing and Islamist ideologies at the same time played a crucial role in justifying the need for a strong military and its political influence.<sup>12</sup>

The favorable attitude of the US towards the role of guardianship in the military further enhanced its contribution to policymaking. Indeed, an essential aspect of US security policy during the Cold War was establishing a solid relationship with the Turkish army to safeguard American interests in the region.<sup>13</sup> Richard Perle's 1999 article exemplified this perspective, justifying the 1980 coup as "a response by the Turkish Armed Forces to the breakdown of order and security and the rise of terrorism and widespread random violence in Turkey."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the coup was also beneficial for the US, as the wave of terrorism in Turkey threatened to undermine American support for Turkey and close cooperation in security affairs between the two countries. This perception was reinforced by the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as US President in 1981 and the apparent stagnation under the aging leadership of Leonid Brezhnev and his successors in the Kremlin.<sup>15</sup> As will further be analyzed in the following chapter, the emergence of Turgut Özal as Prime Minister in Turkey also had a noteworthy impact in shaping Ankara's foreign policies. Indeed, the most distinctive feature of Özal's program was a commitment to economic liberalization, mirroring that of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. This notably restored economic growth and Turkey's external balances, creating important ideological bonds with contemporary Western leaders. Like them, Özal believed that "the second half of the seventies witnessed the failure, not only of the communist system but also...of the

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with a former Turkish Ambassador

<sup>12</sup> Narli, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Narli, N. (2011). Concordance and discordance in Turkish civil-military relations, 1980–2002. *Turkish Studies*, 12(2), 218.

<sup>14</sup> Perle, R. (1999). A Turkish Story: The First Annual Robert Strausz-Hupe Lecture. *FPRI*. <http://www.fpri.org/fpriwire/0711.199909.perle.turkishstory.html>.

<sup>15</sup> For an overall assessment of these changes, see Sezer, D. B. (1993). Turkey and the Western Alliance in the 1980s. In A. Eralp, M. Tünay, & B. A. Yeşilada (Eds.), *The political and socioeconomic transformation of Turkey*. Praeger.

post-war model of society based on Keynesian economics and the welfare state.”<sup>16</sup> The clearest indication of the renewed relationship with the United States was the signing of a new Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) in March 1980, facilitated by lifting the 1974 arms embargo. Despite periodical reductions, Turkey remained the third-largest recipient of US military aid, following Egypt and Israel.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the reduction of conventional forces in Western Europe in 1986 allowed the US and other NATO members to transfer surplus military equipment to Turkey, Greece, and Portugal.<sup>18</sup>

Naturally, strengthening ties between Turkey and the United States in the early 1980s led to growing tensions between Ankara and Moscow. For instance, Turkey strongly criticized the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Although it did not directly aid the Afghan *mujahideen*, it did provide shelter to several thousand Afghan refugees of Turkic (specifically Kirghiz) descent. The signing of the DECA in 1980 further undermined Soviet policy, resulting in sharp attacks on the Turkish government in the Soviet press. On the Turkish side, suspicions were heightened by a Soviet military build-up in the Caucasus in the early 1980s and the Soviet rearming of Syria following the 1982 war in Lebanon. This frosty relationship continued until 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded Konstantin Chernenko as Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, during the second half of the 1980s, Turkey successfully improved its relations with both the Soviet Union and Western powers for the first time since the 1930s. This transformation had significant economic impacts. Between 1987 and 1990, bilateral trade between Turkey and the USSR more than quadrupled, rising from \$476 million to \$1.8 billion.<sup>20</sup> A critical factor in this growth was the supply of Russian natural gas to Turkey via a pipeline through Bulgaria, constructed in 1987 following an agreement reached in September 1984, shortly before Gorbachev came to power. Turkish contractors also began securing major construction deals in the USSR.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, under

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<sup>16</sup> Özal, T. (1992). *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Rev. English ed). Rustem, 300, 304.

<sup>17</sup> Under the new DECA, the US retained access to its 12 most crucial bases in Turkey, including Incirlik and key intelligence-gathering stations, while 13 other facilities reverted to exclusive Turkish control. The Carter administration also pledged increased military and economic aid to Turkey, though it fell short of Turkey’s ambitious military procurement goals. In the following years, annual US military assistance to Turkey peaked at \$715 million in 1984 before declining to \$526 million in 1988 as the Cold War de-escalated.; Karasapan, O. (1987). Turkey’s Armaments Industries. *MERIP Middle East Report*, 144, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Idem. For both Turkey and successive US administrations, the most serious hurdle to the expansion of this relationship was strong pressure in Congress, from both pro-Greek and pro-Armenian lobbies, to limit US aid to Turkey and to maintain a 10:7 ratio in aid to Turkey and Greece (that is, to allow \$10 in aid to Turkey for every \$7 in aid to Greece). However, eventually, the agreement was renewed for another four years in 1988 since, in spite of the decline in the Soviet threat, Turkey still needed military and some economic assistance from the United States. See also Aykan, M. B. (1996). Turkish Perspectives on Turkish-US Relations concerning Persian Gulf Security in the Post-Cold War Era: 1989-1995. *The Middle East Journal*, 50(3), 344–358.

<sup>19</sup> Hirst, S. J., & Isci, O. (2020). Smokestacks and Pipelines: Russian-Turkish Relations and the Persistence of Economic Development. *Diplomatic History*, 44(5), 834–859.

<sup>20</sup> Idem.

<sup>21</sup> Winrow, G. M. (1992). Turkey and former Soviet Central Asia: national and ethnic identity. *Central Asian Survey*, 11(3), 101-111.

Özal's leadership, Turkey's external accounts improved dramatically, allowing Turkey to become a provider of credits to the USSR, reversing the previous more cautious dynamic.<sup>22</sup>

Looking at Ankara's surrounding region, Hale states that "while Turkey's relations with the superpowers were profoundly affected by global changes between the 1960s and 1980s, its relationship with its Middle Eastern neighbors followed a largely independent although fluid course, and was relatively unaffected by domestic political pressures."<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, it is true that due to escalating tensions between Washington and Moscow, Turkey's strategic position became more sensitive, and its cooperation with the US grew increasingly important. However, following the escalations in Cyprus after 1974 and the 1980 military coup in Turkey, the country faced criticism from Western nations, mainly European states, over its political instability and unpredictable actions.<sup>24</sup> As such, feeling more isolated, Turkey sought to strengthen relations with countries less concerned about its military nondemocratic rule, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran. Concurrently, the emergence of new political parties and figures within Turkey prompted unprecedented activism in TFP. For instance, Turkey improved its relations with the Gulf countries during this period. King Khalid of Saudi Arabia was among the first heads of state to send a proclamation message to General Kenan Evren following the coup, who subsequently visited Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Between 1980 and 1983, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait agreed to cooperate in military training, arms trade, and joint investment, causing concern in Iran, Greece, and the USSR. Following the 1983 elections, the Özal government continued this policy. It sought to attract Gulf capital to Turkey by enacting laws to enable foreigners to buy property and establish financial institutions in Turkey.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Turkey's increased activity in the Middle East was also evident in its participation in the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) summits. Although Ankara never became a *de jure* member of the OIC, as the Turkish Parliament had not ratified its charter, it began to use this forum more frequently in the 1980s.<sup>26</sup> At the 1981 OIC summit, Turkey was represented for the first time by its Prime Minister, Bülent Ulusu. At this summit, the Turkish Cypriot delegation led by Rauf Denktaş was given official status as the representative of the Cyprus-Turkish Federated State. At the Casablanca Summit in 1984, Turkey was represented by its President for the first time, and Kenan Evren was also elected as the Deputy Chairman of the conference.<sup>27</sup> Overall, TFP's

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, in 1989, the Turkish Eximbank extended two credit lines of \$150 million each to the Soviet Union for purchasing Turkish consumer goods, with additional larger credits granted in 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Hale, 2012, 123.

<sup>24</sup> See Adamson, F. B. (2001). Democratization and the domestic sources of foreign policy: Turkey in the 1974 Cyprus crisis. *Political Science Quarterly*, 116(2), 277-303; Ulusoy, K. (2016). The Cyprus conflict: Turkey's strategic dilemma. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18(4), 393-406.

<sup>25</sup> Oran, 2002, 125-126.

<sup>26</sup> Hale, 2012, 171.

<sup>27</sup> Oran, 2002, 127-128.



relative success in the Middle East during this period was due to its aiming to separate its regional policy from its alliance with Western powers as much as possible and to develop bilateral rather than multilateral relationships with key states in the region.<sup>28</sup> To put it differently, Turkish policy wanted to avoid taking sides in regional disputes, whether between states or within them.<sup>29</sup>

In the same period, however, structural issues remained salient. For instance, the traditional tension in Turkish-Syrian relations began to deteriorate due to Syria's territorial claims against Turkey over the Hatay/Alexandretta province and issues with water management of trans-border rivers. Additionally, in this period, Syria provided substantial support to the PKK, offering shelter to its leaders and allowing training camps in Syrian-controlled Lebanon.<sup>30</sup> In parallel, the cold relations between Syria and Turkey significantly improved relations between Turkey and Israel. For instance, Turkey not only abstained from a UN resolution protesting Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights in 1981 but also developed new forms of cooperation. This is because Lebanon served as a safe haven for Armenian terrorist organizations such as the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the Justice Commandos for the Genocide of Armenians (JCGA), both of which had been targeting Turkish diplomats abroad since the 1970s. Following its invasion of Lebanon, Israel secretly informed Turkey and offered cooperation, resulting in joint Turkish and Israeli operations that destroyed terrorist camps.<sup>31</sup> After 1986, Turkish-Israeli relations also had a new diplomatic impetus as the Turks recognized the importance of gaining the support of the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington as a way to address their issues with the US Congress. Under apparent pressure from Washington, Turkey upgraded its relations with Israel by appointing a senior diplomat, Ekrem Güvendiren, to head its legation in Tel Aviv.<sup>32</sup> This rapprochement was facilitated by the beginning of the Arab-Israeli peace process, marked by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)'s acceptance of Israel's existence and the principle of a "two-state solution" in Palestine in 1988. Just as the relaxation of the Cold War allowed Turkey to develop good relations with the West and the USSR, changes in Middle Eastern politics made it easier for Turkey to "maintain friendships with Arabs and Israelis simultaneously."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This was highlighted in three interviews with three former Ambassadors of the time.

<sup>29</sup> Hale 2012, 170.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>31</sup> Oran, 2002, 150-151.

<sup>32</sup> Yavuz, M. H., & Khan, M. R. (1992). Turkish foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict: Duality and the development (1950-1991). *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 14(4), 81.

<sup>33</sup> Aras, B. (2000). Turkish-Israeli-Iranian relations in the nineties: Impact on the Middle East. *Middle East Policy*, 7(3), 151-164; Aykan, M. B. (1993). The Palestinian question in Turkish foreign policy from the 1950s to the 1990s. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25(1), 91-110.

Turkey also faced essential developments in the Balkans in the same period, during which its policy had three key objectives. First, the Balkans are the main route to Europe, and Turkey's trade partners have primarily been European states. Thus, the stability of the Balkans was crucial for keeping this trade route open. Given that Bulgaria and Greece, as neighbors, traditionally held the potential to block this route, Turkey was consistently concerned about a possible Bulgarian-Greek alliance. Second, the Turkish Thrace region constitutes part of Turkey's total territory. Despite being one of the most populated areas, close to industrial zones, and vital for the defense of Istanbul and the Straits, it has a limited hinterland and lacks geographical depth. The region's flat character and absence of large rivers or mountain chains make it vulnerable to attacks. Therefore, with already hostile relations with Greece, Turkey aimed to keep Bulgaria neutral. Third, the presence of Turkish and Muslim minority groups in the Balkans and the influence of a "Balkan lobby" within Turkey traditionally compelled the latter to act on behalf of these groups against discrimination or violence.<sup>34</sup> Overall, Turkey's relations with Balkan countries remained limited in those years. However, while relations with Greece were hostile due to the Cyprus question, Turkey began to develop friendly relations with other Balkan countries in the late 1970s. For instance, Bülent Ecevit's government mainly supported this policy, and his first official visit after taking office in 1978 was to Yugoslavia.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1980s, Turkey encountered another challenge in the area. Under Zhivkov's rule, Bulgaria started a campaign to assimilate the Turkish minority, which comprised approximately 10% of Bulgaria's population. This campaign alarmed the Turkish public, and due to public pressure, the Özal Government issued a note to Bulgaria in March 1985, demanding negotiations to address the problems of the Turkish minority. Simultaneously, Turkey sought to draw international attention to the issue, insisting that Bulgaria allow the Turkish population to emigrate to Turkey. In 1989, the Zhivkov regime decided to expel Turks in mass, resulting in 312,000 people fleeing to Turkey between June and August 1989. Although Turgut Özal once remarked, "Let everyone come, Zhivkov may come too," Turkey eventually imposed a visa requirement to stop the massive influx of refugees.<sup>36</sup> Another fear during this crisis was the Greek-Bulgarian rapprochement, which led to the signing of a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty in 1986, perceived as an alliance against Turkey. Greece also supported Bulgaria's policies against the Turkish minority.<sup>37</sup> Fortunately, the crisis ended with the fall of the Zhivkov regime in November 1989.

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<sup>34</sup> Bulut, E. (2013). 'Friends, Balkans, Statesmen Lend Us Your Ears': The Trans-state and State in Links between Turkey and the Balkans. In D. Kostovicova & V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic (Eds.), *Transnationalism in the Balkans*. Routledge.

<sup>35</sup> Uzgel, İ. (2002). Balkanlarla Kligiler. In B. Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1980)*. İletişim Yayınları, 175.

<sup>36</sup> Hale, 2012, 169.

<sup>37</sup> Uzgel, 2005, 179-180.

Last but not least, Turkey's relations with Europe also underwent a restructuring in the 1980s. Important to note is that the earlier military interventions in Turkey in 1960 and 1971 provoked little reaction from major European states, but the 1980 coup was different.<sup>38</sup> By then, the European public had become more conscious of the need to protect democratic norms in allied states. The European Parliament, more concerned with ideological principles than national governments or bureaucrats, now held more authority within the Community structures. The first reaction to the 1980 coup came from the Council of Europe, an organization Turkey had joined in 1949. Although its membership was mainly symbolic, lacking economic or military power, it was essential to the Turkish elite as a mark of Turkey's European credentials. Following the coup, the Turkish delegation was withdrawn from the Council's Parliamentary Assembly and only reinstated several months after the return to civilian rule. However, Turkey's membership in the Council was not formally suspended. More significantly, in May 1981, the Turkey-EC Association Council agreed on a draft economic aid package to Turkey, known as the Fourth Financial Protocol. Still, under pressure from the European Parliament, this aid was released conditional on effective moves to restore democracy.<sup>39</sup> In November 1981, following the Turkish generals' closure of all previous political parties, the EC Commission decided not to resume any discussions on releasing funds under these conditions. Although it is hard to say with certainty whether the withdrawal of aid substantially influenced the military government's policies, its symbolic significance was considerable and likely encouraged the generals to return to democracy under acceptable conditions.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, the Western powers managed to promote their objectives without provoking a severe or open break with Turkey. Although many Western European observers initially doubted the democratic credentials of the restored civilian regime, Turgut Özal's accession to power in 1983 changed the picture dramatically.<sup>41</sup> On 15 November 1983, on the eve of the election victory by Özal's party, with a new Turkish government still needing to be formed, the Assembly of the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus proclaimed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) an independent state. This resolution further complicated the problem for the incoming Özal government. İter Turkmen, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Turkish government under Prime Minister Bulent Ulusu, announced just after the proclamation, "We did our best to dissuade [Rauf]

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<sup>38</sup> On this period, see Evin, A., & Denton, G. (2012). *Turkey and the European community*. Springer Science & Business Media; Aybey, A. (2004). Turkey and the European Union relations: A historical assessment. *Ankara Avrupa Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 4(1), 19-38; Müftüler-Baç, M. (1997). *Turkey's relations with a changing Europe*. Manchester University Press.

<sup>39</sup> See Dagi, I. D. (1996). Democratic transition in Turkey, 1980–83: the impact of European diplomacy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32(2), 124-141.

<sup>40</sup> Barchard, D. (2023). *Turkey and the West*. Routledge, p. 58-59; Krauss, S. (2000). The European Parliament in EU external relations: The customs union with Turkey. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 5(2).

<sup>41</sup> For a good overview, see Dagi, I. (2001). Human Rights, Democratization and the European Community in Turkish Politics: The Özal Years, 1983-87. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37(1), 17-40.

Denktas from this decision. But they declared their independence. In this case, there was no other option for us than recognizing the TRNC and supporting them.”<sup>42</sup> Here, Turkmen suggests that Turkey was confronted with a *fait accompli*. On the other hand, immediately after coming to office, Özal had focused on removing the issue from the security agenda. For example, he maintained a platform for establishing better bilateral relations with Greece during his campaign. He promoted his plan to declare the island’s northern part only as a free trade zone. He agreed with the liberal view that trade would bring peace and believed that once the island became an economic hub, the Greek and Turkish communities would be more disposed to peaceful solutions to their political problems.<sup>43</sup>

In that sense, Özal’s strategy to shift Turkey’s security-oriented foreign policy towards an economy-focused approach aimed to give the impression that Turkey was more inclined towards reconciliation over the Cyprus issue. Özal’s first step was to convey a clear message that the Cyprus issue was not the sole priority of Turkish foreign policy: “These issues [Cyprus and Aegean disputes] thoroughly came to orient our foreign policy, especially Cyprus... Turkey must be a state that could not be preoccupied only with this issue in its foreign policy.”<sup>44</sup> On 3 January 1984, he announced Turkey’s decision to withdraw fifteen hundred soldiers from Cyprus.<sup>45</sup> Given that the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus totaled twenty-five hundred soldiers, Özal’s decision was intended as a significant gesture of goodwill from Turkey. During his premiership, Özal consistently supported the mediation initiatives of the then UN secretary-general, Perez de Cuellar. In his speeches on international affairs, Özal emphasized bizonal and independent federal solutions based on the political equality of the two communities, with Turkey as a guarantor. He also called for the international community to contribute to the solution by lifting economic restrictions against Northern Cyprus.<sup>46</sup> These initiatives shifted TFP from a traditional, cautious, and security-oriented approach to a more daring one.<sup>47</sup>

Another move away from a firm and cautious approach became clear with Özal’s stance towards Europe. Despite recommendations from Turkey’s allies not to participate in the European Council meeting and Evren’s decision to place full responsibility on Özal, he pursued participation and inclusion in the Council. Predicting that the latter would not impose heavier sanctions on Turkey, Özal assessed the situation and took a calculated risk. Additionally, while traditional TFP regarded

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<sup>42</sup> Cumhuriyet. (1983, November 11). Türkmen: Biz Onaylamadık, Vazgeçirmek için Uğraştık.

<sup>43</sup> Öniş, Z. (1995). Turkey in the post-Cold War era: in search of identity. *Middle East Journal*, 49(1), 48-68.

<sup>44</sup> Cumhuriyet. (1983, November 11). Türkmen: Biz Onaylamadık, Vazgeçirmek için Uğraştık.

<sup>45</sup> “Cumhuriyet. (1984, January 4). Kıbrıs’tan 1500 Asker Çekiyoruz.

<sup>46</sup> Directorate General of Press and Information. (1986). *Başbakan Turgut Özal’ın İngiltere Ziyareti*. Directorate General of Press and Information, 19; Özal, T. (1988). *Başbakan Turgut Özal’ın yurtdışı temaslarındaki konuşmaları: 13.12.1987-12.12.1988*. Başbakanlık Basımevi.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a Turkish historian.

security issues as a “national case,” with any alternative policy seen as a “concession,” he took significant steps to change this security-oriented policy. He succeeded in reshaping the perception of Turkey as a supporter of peaceful resolutions and economic interdependence. Indeed, Özal was firmly committed to liberalizing Turkey’s international trade, regardless of its effects on relations with the European Community. In 1987, he told the Turkish Parliament that “the aim of the economic liberalization program and our reforms was to facilitate our integration into the European Community as a full member.”<sup>48</sup> While this may have been somewhat of a misrepresentation, as Özal would likely have pursued economic liberalization anyway, his reforms did assist the process of economic integration with the EC. Another aspect to note is how, despite his attachment to Islam and occasional appeals to the moderate Islamist vote in domestic politics, Özal believed this should not hinder Turkey’s eventual accession to the European Community.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, the removal of trade barriers resumed after 1983, and in April 1987, the government submitted a formal application for full membership. Although this application was premature, the European Community had to consider it, and the Commission prepared its official Opinion on the application. After a long delay, this was issued in December 1989 and formally accepted by the Council of Ministers in February 1990. Essentially, the Commission’s Opinion was a polite rebuff of the Turkish application as it cited the substantial development gap between the Community and Turkey, Turkey’s disputes with Greece, the Cyprus problem, and Turkey’s human rights regime and respect for the identity of minorities as not yet reaching the level required in a democracy and not satisfying the Copenhagen criteria.<sup>50</sup> On these grounds, it recommended that no accession negotiations begin until after 1993 at the earliest, with no subsequent date set, and that, in the meantime, the two sides should focus on completing the customs union, as planned in the Additional Protocol. When the Opinion was issued, Commissioner Abel Matutes confirmed that Turkey was still eligible to become a full member of the Community in

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Müftüler, M. (1995). Turkish economic liberalization and European integration. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31(1), 85.

<sup>49</sup> See Özal, 1992, 281–304.

<sup>50</sup> Frequently referred also as the “*acquis communautaire*”, it refers to criteria established by the EU at the European Council meeting in Copenhagen in 1993. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union during 1989–91, eastern European states began pushing to be admitted into the EU. At Copenhagen, EU member states agreed on the criteria that any state that wished to join the EU, whether from Eastern Europe or not, should fulfill. These consisted of: (1) stable political institutions and the guarantee of human rights and the rule of law; (2) economic stability and the existence of a robust market that could cope with economic integration with the EU; and (3) an acceptance of the Community Acquis, the body of EU law that has developed since the beginning of European integration in the 1950s. In addition to these criteria, the EU stipulated that its own institutions needed to be prepared to accept new members. The Copenhagen Criteria appeared to provide objective benchmarks for new member states and thus provided great incentives for potential candidate states to engage in political, legal, and economic reform. At the same time, however, the decision on whether candidate states for membership fulfilled the Copenhagen Criteria became a political one, so the Criteria were criticized for being far from fully objective in their application. See Saatçioğlu, B. (2009). How closely does the European Union’s membership conditionality reflect the Copenhagen criteria? Insights from Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 10(4), 559-576; Müftüler-Bac, M. (2002). Turkey in the EU’s Enlargement Process: obstacles and challenges. *Mediterranean Politics*, 7(2), 79-95.

principle. However, it was clear that Turkey's Western European partners "were anxious to delay the process as long as possible."<sup>51</sup>

### **3.1.2. External Projection Parameters**

#### **3.1.2.1. "Economy First" and the Military Industry**

Having described how structural parameters related to the systemic level shaped TFP in the 1980s, it is essential to note the other two structural parameters that contributed slowly – yet with a consistent pace – to forge change in Turkey's external stance: economic power and defense industry. First, although Turkish leaders continued to prioritize integration with the West as a key foreign policy goal, due to the fear of Turkey's isolation from the West, Ankara also had to make efforts to develop relations with the surrounding regions. Additionally, the growth in Turkish exports compelled policymakers to focus on previously neglected areas such as the Balkans, the Black Sea, and the Middle East. Despite crises with Bulgaria, Greece, Lebanon, and Syria in the 1980s, Turkey's relations with these regions improved, particularly in the economic sphere. While exports to all regions grew substantially, trade with Middle Eastern countries experienced the most significant surge.<sup>52</sup> As a result, economic factors became increasingly influential in shaping relations with the region. The rise in oil prices and growing Turkish consumption increased Turkish dependency on Middle Eastern oil during the 1980s. Turkish imports from the Middle East skyrocketed from about \$64 million in 1970 to \$2.8 billion in 1985.<sup>53</sup> In response, Ankara sought new markets in the area to balance its energy imports, leading to a boom in Turkish exports. In 1970, Turkish exports to the region were only \$54 million, but by 1985, this figure had dramatically risen to \$3 billion, with 40.8% of Turkish export goods going to regional countries. The Middle East and Islamic countries became significant consumers of Turkish industrial goods, while Turkey primarily exported agricultural and textile goods to the West. The share of Middle Eastern countries in Turkish manufactured exports increased from 15.1% in 1979 to 33.2% in 1981, 40.3% in 1983, and 41.9% in 1985.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from foreign trade, Turkish companies secured contracts worth about \$18.3 billion from Middle Eastern countries between 1974 and 1990. The number of Turkish contracting companies in the region grew from 22 in 1978 to 113 in 1981, 242 in 1982, and over 300 during the 1980s,

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with a former Turkish delegate to the EC and EU.

<sup>52</sup> Arıcanlı, T., & Rodrik, D. (1990). *The Political Economy of Turkey*. Palgrave Macmillan UK; Robins, P. (with Royal Institute of International Affairs). (1991). *Turkey and the Middle East*. Council on Foreign Relations Press, 101.

<sup>53</sup> Hale, 2012, 170.

<sup>54</sup> Arıcanlı, & Rodrik, 1990. See also Hershlag, Z. Y. (1988). *The contemporary Turkish economy*. Routledge, 84-86.

generating billions of dollars in business. Libya became the biggest market for Turkish contracting companies, with Saudi Arabia and Iraq also prevalent markets.<sup>55</sup> The Turkish government supported contracting and trade companies in the Middle East with low-interest credits, making Turkey a significant creditor, particularly for Iraq and Iran. By 1989, Iraqi debt to Turkey amounted to about \$2 billion. Moreover, contracting companies' demand for more specialized Turkish workers led to the number of Turkish emigrant workers in the Middle East reaching 250,000. These economic ties strengthened political relations, prompting Ankara to pursue further cooperation. Overall, despite the decline and crash of oil prices in 1985 and the end of the Iran-Iraq War later, which increased competition for Turkish companies, the region maintained its special significance in Turkish economic and political relations.<sup>56</sup>

Second, the expansion of Turkey's economic relations allowed the country to adopt more substantial investments in other strategic areas, such as the military industry. As mentioned, the consequences of the Cyprus question in 1974 and the following US embargo highlighted Turkey's difficulties in relying purely on other countries for arms procurement and security in general. The foremost result of this period was the rise of national public consciousness about the need for indigenous and national defense systems in the aftermath of the Cyprus Peace Operation. Such awareness helped Turkey take rapid steps, and state institutions responded positively to calls in this direction. Among the priority areas for the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation (TSKGV), defense enterprises such as the Turkish Aviation Industry (TUSAŞ, 1973), ASELSAN (1975), and later on, ASPIİLSAN (1981) and HAVELSAN (1982) were established with state funds.<sup>57</sup> In response, Ankara began producing amphibious landing ships for the Turkish Naval Forces (TNF), and by 1980, ASELSAN had produced radios for personnel and tanks and had begun exporting them in 1983. Despite these developments, however, it was understood that the available resources and supply policies would not be sufficient to close the TSK's defense equipment deficit, which had been accumulating and growing since the 1950s. In 1985, the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries (*Savunma Sanayi Müsteşarlığı*, SSM) was established to promote development in this sector, and the fifth Five Year Development Plan (1985-1989) highlighted the need to strengthen indigenous production. The year 1985 corresponds to a turning point and the beginning of a new era for the Turkish defense industry. In between the heavy burden of the recent past, the longing for the days when the nation had a solid domestic and national industry, and the demands and political preferences

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<sup>55</sup> Robins, 1991, 110.

<sup>56</sup> Çelik, Y. (1999). Contemporary Turkish foreign policy. Praeger, 62.

<sup>57</sup> Demir, İ. (2020). Transformation of Turkish Defense Industry: The story and rationale of the great rise. *Insight Turkey*, 22(Summer 2020), 24.

for the establishment of a robust industrial infrastructure that includes defense, the Defense Industry Development and Support Administration (SAGEB) was established in 1985, under Law No. 3238, for the development of the defense industry and the modernization of the TSK.

In this period, a relatively more precise road map was drawn for the defense industry with the Turkish Defense Industry Policy and Strategy Principles document in 1988, which would then be implemented closer to the 2000s. Turkish companies expanded their production to include data terminals and laser range finders and, in 1987, became part of a consortium with four NATO members to produce Stinger air defense missiles. In cooperation with the US, Turkey started producing F-16s, with plans to produce 160 aircraft. With offset rights, Turkey could also produce aircraft parts for factories in Belgium and the USA. Despite expectations, the private sector played a minor role in the 1980s.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, these years were crucial for Turkey as it began producing submarines (the Ay Class) and frigates (the Yavuz Class). The humble efforts resulted in a sophisticated national defense industry in the late 1980s. Turkey became a supplier of anti-craft weapons, small arms, communication equipment, military vehicles, and other equipment to NATO members and some other friendly countries, like Egypt and Pakistan. That is to say, despite Özal's admiration for the US, Turkey had learned the lessons of the arms embargo and realized the importance of independence in the defense industry. As a result, unlike Menderes and Demirel, Özal did not rely solely on the West in security matters. As will be seen in detail, due to internal problems and the international environment, Özal could not implement his foreign policy principles as extensively as he desired during this period. Nevertheless, Turkey became more directly connected with the world during the 1980s with growing exports. Additionally, the international developments of the 1980s prepared Turkey for the radical changes of the 1990s. During these years, Turkey, for the first time in its Republican history, turned its attention to its own region, moving "away from Kemal's 'escape from the region policy' and Menderes' Cold War-focused strategies."<sup>59</sup> Moreover, unlike previous policies, the growing economic ties with neighboring countries led Turkey to establish more permanent relations with its neighbors, constituting the basis for greater activism in TFP in the following decades.

### **3.2. The Internal Level**

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<sup>58</sup> Uzgel, 2002, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a historian of the period.



### 3.2.1. The Institutional and Political Setting of the Post-Coup Era

Throughout the 1980s, Turkey's domestic political order shifted somewhat later than global trends, yet these changes were equally impactful in steering foreign policy. On September 12, 1980, the country experienced its third military coup since 1960, an event that, in the long run, would become an essential watershed as it brought about fundamental changes to Turkish domestic politics, society, economics, and, consequently, foreign policy. This coup was led by the four force commanders of the Turkish Armed Forces under the leadership of Chief of Staff General Kenan Evren, who ousted Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) from the government. Officially, the army intervened with four distinct aims in mind: to suppress terrorism and radicalism, to restore economic growth and stability, to introduce a new Constitution and legal arrangements that would stabilize the system and prevent anarchy, and to re-establish civilian democracy on a Kemalist basis.<sup>60</sup>

This last element represents a fundamental landmark in understanding how the sociopolitical changes of this phase would pave the way for the following restructuring of domestic and foreign policy during the Özal-led governments. Indeed, as an initial step, the military rulers quickly moved to revive the Kemalist doctrine.<sup>61</sup> From an ideological point of view, they believed that both left-wing and right-wing ideologies were foreign to the Turkish people and were to blame for the turmoil of the 1970s. In contrast, Kemalism was seen as the only ideology to foster national unity. Consequently, a vocal state-run campaign was initiated to reinstate Kemalism as the national ideology, with all other ideologies being removed from power.<sup>62</sup> However, the type of Kemalism that emerged following the 1980 coup differed significantly from earlier versions. It was a flexible and pragmatic ideology that lessened some of its "unchangeable principles," asserting that what benefited the Turkish nation was inherently beneficial for Kemalism.<sup>63</sup> The claim was that this conceptualization of the ideology was committed to democracy, unlike İnönü's autocratic version. This type of Kemalism also implied a revision of structural conceptualizations. Unlike Bülent Ecevit's uncertain interpretation, the military

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<sup>60</sup> Hale, W. (1988). Transition to Civilian Governments in Turkey: The Military Perspective. In M. Heper & A. Evin (Eds.), *State, Democracy, and the Military* (pp. 159–176). DE GRUYTER, 166.

<sup>61</sup> See Karabelias, G. (1999). The evolution of civil-military relations in post-war Turkey, 1980–95. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(4), 130–15.

<sup>62</sup> Kemalist literature was published, 1981 was declared the "Atatürk Year," and new institutions were established or financially supported to promote Kemalism within society. Streets, roads, and buildings were renamed after Atatürk, and various institutions were consolidated into the central Supreme Atatürk Society. See Karpas, K. H. (2004). Military interventions: Army-civilian relations in Turkey before and after 1980. In Studies on Turkish Politics and Society. In K. H. Karpas, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society: Selected Articles and Essays*. BRILL.

<sup>63</sup> Kaplan, S. (2002). Din-u devlet all over again? The politics of military secularism and religious militarism in Turkey following the 1980 coup. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34(1), 113–127.

stressed its pro-Western and pro-American character. For Evren, the coup leader, the US was Turkey's most important ally, and the Soviet Union remained the greatest threat to Turkish security.<sup>64</sup>

Lastly, economic implications underpinned a departure from the traditional Kemalist statism in favor of a more liberal posture. For some, this Kemalism was capitalist in nature, envisioning Turkey's future within the capitalist world rather than the socialist one. However, although the restoration of stability was broadly welcomed, the new regime's conceptualization of liberalism appeared to be limited to material elements, such that it faced substantial international criticism due to extensive human rights abuses and the militainment of a restrictive social environment.<sup>65</sup> As such, according to Laçiner, "the thing the generals understood least of all was the economy, and without economic success, the coup could not be successful."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, when PM Bülent Ulusu was finally asked to form the first government, the National Security Council (MGK) announced that it would retain Turgut Özal as Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, being the spirit behind the last Demirel government's liberal economic reforms. Indeed, under Özal's economic guidance, inflation dropped, exports increased rapidly, and the GDP increased by 4.5% in 1981.<sup>67</sup> On the one hand, this meant that the military regime succeeded in revitalizing the economy. On the other hand, while it struggled to establish a civilian political system according to its design, "this economic success contributed to highlighting the role of emerging political figures like Özal at the expense of the old system where the military enjoyed a strong hold on power."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, this also showed that the 1980 coup was a conservative-capitalist interpretation of Kemalism, in the sense that Özal and the army's liberal policies were closer to the capitalist world but, at the same time, more conservative than previous Kemalist military takeovers.<sup>69</sup>

Nonetheless, the prevailing view among the generals was that civilian rule should be reinstated. This perspective was further bolstered by pressure from American and European sources. The MGK was prepared to restore civilian governance but sought to ensure its preferred political structure was in place.<sup>70</sup> In the autumn of 1982, the military and its chosen academics drafted a new Constitution and presented it in a national referendum. As a result, Evren became the President, and the MGK acquired extraordinary powers over the government and Parliament. One of the MGK's initial actions was to ban all political activities and dissolve Islamist, extreme nationalist, and leftist

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<sup>64</sup> Idem.

<sup>65</sup> Bekaroğlu, E., & Barnes, T. (2021). Dictatorships and universities: The 1980 Turkish military coup d'état and Turkish geography. *Political Geography*, 91, 102481.

<sup>66</sup> Laçiner, S. (2009). Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism. *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law*, 2, 153–205, 160.

<sup>67</sup> Lewis, J. D., & Urata, S. (1983). Turkey: Recent economic performance and medium-term prospects, 1978-1990. World Bank.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with a subject expert.

<sup>69</sup> Karpat, 2004.

<sup>70</sup> Karabelias, 1999.

organizations and all pre-coup political parties. Evren and his circle were determined to avoid repeating the Democratic Party (DP) scenario, where banned parties had resurfaced under new names following the coups of the 1960s and 1970s against Menderes. Therefore, the MGK promoted new political figures. Before the elections, two moderate parties were established: the moderate right-wing Nationalist Democracy Party (*Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi*, MDP) and the moderate left Populist Party (*Halkçı Parti*, HP). Both Evren and the MGK believed that with these moderate and Kemalist right and left parties, a stable democratic system could be established, and it was confident in the MDP's victory.

However, when Özal formed his own new party, the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*, ANAP), the army's plans were spoiled. As the architect of the economic reforms, Özal was a well-known person now, both inside and outside the country, and managed to win 45% of the votes and 212 of the 400 seats in Parliament. Özal also secured a second electoral victory in 1987 and continued as Prime Minister until succeeding Evren as President in 1989. He provided Turkey with a stable single-party government that it had not experienced since the late 1960s, enabling the construction and execution of consistent foreign policy and leadership. Constitutionally, the military regime banned Bülent Ecevit and Süleyman Demirel from politics until 1992. However, this did not stop them from establishing their parties under proxy leaders and campaigning successfully to remove the bans in 1987.<sup>71</sup> However, neither they nor a new center-left party, the Social Democrat People's Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*, SHP), led by İsmet İnönü's son Erdal, managed to break Özal's hold on power until 1991. Similarly, the Islamist Necmettin Erbakan re-established his former National Salvation Party (*Millî Selâmet Partisi*, MSP) as the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP). Still, the generals prevented it from competing in the 1983 elections and failed to win any seats in 1987. At this stage, Erbakan and the Islamists seemed marginalized, with part of his electoral base captured by the ANAP, which actively sought the support of moderate Islamic voters.<sup>72</sup>

As such, the 1983 elections marked the beginning of the Özal era, which lasted approximately ten years and brought significant economic, technological, educational, and political transformations to Turkey. During the initial seven years, the military rulers granted the President special authority to safeguard the system they had put in place, limiting PM Özal's ability to fully implement his ideas, particularly in social and human rights and foreign policy. However, as the military's influence over the government gradually waned, Özal was able to put his transformative ideas into action. Important

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<sup>71</sup> Ecevit's wife Rahşan led the DSP, and Demirel's DYP was formed using similar practices.

<sup>72</sup> For fuller accounts of Turkish politics during the 1980s, see Pope, H., & Pope, N. (2011). *Turkey unveiled: A history of modern Turkey* ([Rev. and updated ed.], 1. publ). Overlook; Hale, W. (2013). *Turkish Politics and the Military* (1st ed.). Routledge; Karpas, 2004. For a detailed narrative of the coup of 1980 and the events leading up to it, see Birand, M. A. (1987). *The generals' coup in Turkey: An inside story of 12 September 1980* (1st English ed). Brassey's Defence Publishers.

to note is that, during these years, he developed a new foreign policy known as “Özalism” or “neo-Ottomanism,” which, according to some, “symbolized the ‘funeral’ of Kemalism.”<sup>73</sup> Özal acknowledged that he shared the same ideological roots as Bayar, Menderes, and Demirel, and Özalism can be seen as a continuation of those movements. However, as will be demonstrated, despite the ongoing influence of the democratic-liberal-conservative trend since the Ottoman Empire, Özalism is distinct from these earlier currents in terms of the conceptualization behind his domestic and foreign policies.

### 3.2.2. The Özal Way of Breaking the Institutional Model

Concerning this thesis’s theoretical framework, it is relevant to recall that “change” in a country’s foreign policy derives from different sources, including the leader, bureaucratic advocacy, domestic restructuring, and external shocks.<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, this section examines the parameters of change – and the type of change – in TFP during the period of Özal and his office party. First and foremost, it is crucial to consider that when the latter came to power, the government had only recently transitioned from military to civilian rule. As such, military leaders knew that the armed forces were still enjoying significant influence through the MGK.<sup>75</sup> This was favored because several amendments weakened future political parties before transitioning to a multi-party system.<sup>76</sup> Hence, introducing a new Constitution and its “acceptance by the people” indicated that reconstructing the country’s major political institutions was irreversible.<sup>77</sup> The new institutional framework abolished the Senate, reduced the membership of the GNA to 400 with an increased term of five years, and enlarged the political power of the President of the Republic.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly enough, for the first

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with a Turkish MP and an academician.

<sup>74</sup> Hermann, 1990, 5–6.

<sup>75</sup> Interview.

<sup>76</sup> For instance, Provisional Article 4 of the 1982 Constitution prohibited party chairmen and senior office holders from engaging in active politics for ten years.

<sup>77</sup> According to the referendum's official results on 7 Nov. 1982, 91.4 % of the voters in a 91.3 % turnout approved the proposed Constitution. In addition to valid objections one can have about the final outcome of any elections conducted under a martial law government, it is interesting to point out that the Turkish people did not have much of a choice. As the then Prime Minister Bülend Ulusu had pointed out on 14 July 1982, if the people voted ‘no’ in the referendum, the military would not return to the barracks but remain in power. General Kenan Evren seemed to share Ulusu’s view. In other words, the people had to choose between a Constitution proposed by the military or the continuation of the military dictatorship. See Karabelias, 1999.

<sup>78</sup> With regard to his executive function, the President’s powers were appointing the Prime Minister and accepting his resignation, presiding over the meetings of the Council of Ministers whenever he deems it necessary, calling a meeting of the MGK and presiding over it, proclaiming martial law or a state of emergency in collaboration with the Council of Ministers, appointing the chairman and members of the State Supervisory Council as well as the members of the Board of Higher Education, appointing the Chief of the General Staff, and appointing university rectors. His powers pertaining to the judicial function were appointing the members of the Constitutional Court, one-fourth of the members of the Council of State, the members of the High Military Administrative Court, the Military Court of Appeal, as well as those of the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors. See Özbudun, E. (1988). *The Status of*

seven-year term, the new President was granted the right to veto any Constitutional amendments that the government would propose (Article 175).<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the 1983 Political Parties Act imposed restrictions on the formation of new political parties, and the Elections Act of the same year hindered the representation of minor parties in Parliament by introducing a 10% national threshold.<sup>80</sup> It is also essential to recall that the MGK comprised ten members, equally divided between civilians (the President of the Republic, Prime Minister, and Ministers of Defense, Internal Affairs, and Foreign Affairs) and military officers (Chief of General Staff, Commanders of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and the General Commander of the Gendarmerie).

However, following the 1980 coup, the MGK's decisions became as influential as decrees, far exceeding mere recommendations to the executive branch. The military could enforce these decisions because the General Secretariat had the authority to monitor executive decision-making.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, as Karabelias recognizes, the government was still obliged "to give priority consideration to the decisions of the MGK [that...] although not responsible to the GNA, had almost become the 'highest, non-elected, decision-making body' of the [Turkish] state."<sup>82</sup> While the officers permitted Özal to form a party and run for election, they were cautious about his ideological background close to Islamist and conservative circles. For instance, the Council drew the government's attention to the "undesirable beliefs" that religious programs on TV and radio could impart to the viewers and listeners, urged the government to be on its guard concerning the efforts of one of Turkey's neighbors to export its Islamic revolution to Turkey as well, and asked the government to take seriously the signs for an Islamic revival in Turkey. As President, even Evren himself adopted a double role as an active head of the statist executive and a passive head of the political executive.<sup>83</sup> For instance, when Özal considered appointing İhsan Doğramacı, the founding President of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey – an institution created by the generals to oversee the higher education system – as the Foreign Minister in his first cabinet, Evren preferred to keep Doğramacı in his current role and recommended the appointment of the former Ambassador Vahit Halefoğlu as head of the MFA.

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the President of the Republic under the Turkish Constitution of 1982: Presidentialism or Parliamentarism? In M. Heper & A. Evin (Eds.), *State, Democracy, and the Military* (pp. 37–46). DE GRUYTER, 39.

<sup>79</sup> Karabelias, 1999, 134.

<sup>80</sup> Narlı, 2011, 217.

<sup>81</sup> Karabelias, 1999, 135. Empowered by Article 118 of the 1982 Constitution and Article 35 of the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Act of 1961, the MGK took the lead in defining internal and external threats, setting national security priorities, and formulating national security policy in the form of a National Security Policy Document with minimal consultation with elected representatives. It also had the authority to oversee the revision of this document every five years. For the autonomy of the Turkish military in the 1980–2002 period, see Sakallioğlu, Ü. C. (1997). The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy. *Comparative Politics*, 29(2), 151.

<sup>82</sup> According to Articles 33 and 34 of the Law on the Election of Deputies No.2839, all parties needed to win at least 10 % of the national vote to qualify for Parliamentary seats. In addition, the new law set a local quota which parties had to exceed to gain any seats in the constituency. Hale, 2012, 259.

<sup>83</sup> Heper, M. (1990). The Executive in the Third Turkish Republic, 1982–1989. *Governance*, 3(3), 309.

To avoid conflict with the generals, Özal acquiesced to Evren's suggestion and offered the position to Halefoğlu.<sup>84</sup>

Nonetheless, many scholars of Turkish civil-military relations agree that the Özal era can be characterized as a period of gradually challenging the military's formal and informal influence, thereby strengthening civilian control in the political sphere. This shift occasionally led to discord in government-military relations. To reduce the military's influence on public policy, Özal implemented two significant measures. Despite his opposition to the return of these former leaders, he allowed a 1987 referendum to let the people decide whether to repeal Provisional Article 4 of the 1982 Constitution, which banned leaders of pre-1980 coup political parties from returning to active politics. Then, he facilitated the formation of new political parties by removing restrictions that prevented Parliamentary deputies from moving between parties. Moreover, by extending the civilian cabinet's authority to internal security matters, Özal took a significant step toward an attempt to demilitarize formal political decision-making.<sup>85</sup> As Heper notes,

The "Third Turkish Republic" turned out to be a compromise between the state and the political elite. The "state" and "politics" were now two distinct spheres, each with a separate executive. The "Third Turkish Republic" evinced a statist executive on the one hand and a political executive on the other.<sup>86</sup>

For instance, his government attempted to extend his cabinet's authority to internal security by creating regional governorships with extraordinary political powers and giving the Prime Minister unprecedented control over the recruitment and personnel policies of the National Intelligence Agency (MİT). He also tried to challenge military autonomy and establish political authority over it. As Mufti notes, "Özal launched it with gusto and full self-awareness, telling audiences that ever since Atatürk's time, Turkish politics had been characterized by a bifurcation between a 'statist' current represented by İnönü and a 'liberal' current represented by Celal Bayar, pointing out that 'serious' national development did not occur until the latter current assumed power in 1950".<sup>87</sup> In this regard, Özal made it clear that, for him, continued progress required confronting the champions of statism ensconced in the *Harbiye* (the military academy) and *Mülkiye* (the foreign policy and diplomatic academy). After the coup, his initial encounters with the former benefited from internal TSK divisions. In the summer of 1987, he overruled the senior military command's recommendation to appoint General Necdet Öztörün as Chief of the General Staff. Instead, he appointed General Necip Torumtay, his preferred candidate. With this move that became known in Turkish media as a "civilian

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<sup>84</sup> Idem.

<sup>85</sup> For Özal's demilitarization, see Karabelias, G. (1999). The evolution of civil-military relations in post-war Turkey, 1980–95. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(4), 130–151; Evin, A. (1994). Demilitarization and Civilianization of the Regime. In M. Heper & A. Evin (Eds.), *Politics in the third Turkish Republic*. Westview Press.

<sup>86</sup> Heper, 1990, 306. See also Karabelias, 1999, 137.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 59.

coup,”<sup>88</sup> Özal broke old taboos by publicly discussing defense funds and announced that his cabinet planned to make the Chief of the General Staff report to the defense minister, aligning with practices in Western democratic governments.<sup>89</sup>

Although these attempts extended his cabinet’s influence in various areas and the civil bureaucracy,<sup>90</sup> up to 1987, the military continued to dictate the evolution of some events.<sup>91</sup> In due course, however, several events forced Özal to take specific political steps that were bound to challenge the traditional role of the officer corps in Turkish politics.<sup>92</sup> Such occurrences were the climbing rate of inflation and the criticism it raised about the economic policy of his administration,<sup>93</sup> the increasing pressure which the pre-1980 party leaders gradually put on the government with their potential return to active political life,<sup>94</sup> the demilitarization attitude of the press and the intellectuals<sup>95</sup> and most of all, the conciliatory attitude of the prominent representatives of the military institution towards the Prime Minister.<sup>96</sup>

As mentioned, Özal skillfully engaged with national security issues within this context, while Evren primarily handled matters concerning foreign security.<sup>97</sup> Since Özal allocated resources for restructuring and modernizing the military, crucial in maintaining civil-military concordance, the Özalist policies were considered to “meet the needs and requirements of both the armed forces and society.”<sup>98</sup> Indeed, to further change the political system, Özal strengthened civil society and the business elite by passing laws that allowed the formation of civilian associations. He empowered the

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<sup>88</sup> Idem.

<sup>89</sup> Except for the period 1949 to 1960 in which the Ministry of Defense had the responsibility to manage the armed forces and make the appointments, all other times it was entrusted with the minor role of the orderly recruitment of soldiers and procurement of supplies. Except for the period 1949 to 1960 in which the Ministry of Defense had the responsibility to manage the armed forces and make the appointments, all other times it was entrusted with the minor role of the orderly recruitment of soldiers and procurement of supplies. See Mackenzie, K. (1987). Turkey: Ozal vs the Generals. *Middle East. International*.

<sup>90</sup> Heper, & Evin, 1988.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, the military returned to the barracks according to its own timetable. Despite the gradual lifting of martial law, its presence in public life remained a strong one since those indicted under martial law continued to be prosecuted in military courts, and the evolution of events in the southeast region raised a lot of questions as to whether the military would completely forego its policing duties. Moreover, “their dominance in the TSK command, as evidenced by the promotion to key positions of Sabri Yirmibeşoğlu, Burhanettin Bigalı, Kemal Yavuz and Eşref Bitlis at the 1990 Higher Military Council. Özal’s attempt to wrest the MİT away from TSK control (the intelligence service’s directors were traditionally drawn from the military) also produced disappointing results, as did an attempt to ‘civilianize’ the Defense Ministry and enhance its authority over the General Staff. See *Bay Pipo bir MİT görevlisinin sıradışı yaşamı: Hiram Abas* (Birinci basım) (with Yalçın, S., & Yurdakul, D.). (2016). Kırmızı kedi yayınevi.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with a former military member.

<sup>93</sup> Landau, J. M., & Heper, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (1st edition). Routledge, 157.

<sup>94</sup> The democratic legitimacy of the 1983 elections was put to the test both in the 1984 local elections in which the MP gained 41.5 % of the vote, to be followed by the SHP with 23.4 % and the DYP (DYP) with 13.5 % and in the 1986 by-elections in which the MP received only 32 % of the votes whereas the DYP received 23.5 % and the SHP Populist Party (SHP) 22.8 %.

<sup>95</sup> Alkan, T. (1986). *12 Eylül ve demokrasi*. CHP Archives. <https://kutuphane.chp.org.tr/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=12593>.

<sup>96</sup> Karabelias, 1999, 137.

<sup>97</sup> For the Presidency of General Evren (1982–1989), see Heper, 1990.

<sup>98</sup> This was made public only in 2009 by Hasan Celal Güzel, a member of the Council of Ministers during Özal times. Quoted in Göker Önen, H. (2020). *Crossing Identities and the Turkish Military: Revolutionists, Guardians and Depoliticals: A comparative historical analysis on Turkish military culture and civil-military relations*. BiblioScout, 200.

business circles through a new liberal economic policy and supported small and medium-sized entrepreneurs in Anatolia. His liberal economic reforms integrated the Turkish economy into the global capitalist system.<sup>99</sup>

This aligns with a second aspect: the economy was the top priority for each of Özal's governments. Consequently, his focus on the economic aspects of foreign policy allowed the generals to retain final authority over defense policy. In this sense, at least initially, Özal did not advocate for a radical departure from traditional Turkish foreign policy overall. Instead, he adopted an approach that would allow a gradual alteration in its various components. Indeed, as he firmly believed that Turkey's democratic, economic, and technological development could be accomplished through Westernization, his government seemed to align with Western tendencies within traditional TFP. In fact, his main problem with conventional Turkish foreign policy was not its Western orientation but its adherence to the status quo and guardedness.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, although FM Halefoğlu was considered, like his predecessor Liter Turkmen, to be a highly sophisticated diplomat who would be expected to personify the continuity of Turkish foreign policy, the advent of the Özal government "provoked speculations about a shift at least in emphasis if not in substance."<sup>101</sup>

Such speculations were prompted by the fact that, especially in the early stages, the control of Özal over his party was so intense and absolute that some political observers claimed that "ANAP is not a party but the Özal Fan Club."<sup>102</sup> This can be explained by looking at the party's program, which referred to its ambitions of transformation with the ostentatious title "Great Structural Transformation" (*Büyük Yapısal Değişim*).<sup>103</sup> Overall, these programs aimed to change the perception and the influential role and structures of state bureaucracy in a notably different way. Reform attempts under this approach focused on so-called "administrative reform," traditionally aimed at improving bureaucratic structures. However, the party shifted from this developmental approach to an entirely new perspective on the role of bureaucracy. Instead of equating administrative reform with bureaucracy, Özal's government pursued a comprehensive transformation of the state structure, targeting the entire state apparatus. While these efforts were labeled as "transformation of the public

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<sup>99</sup> Öniş, Z. (2004). Turgut Özal and his economic legacy: Turkish neo-liberalism in critical perspective. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(4), 113-134; Ozen, H. (2013). Informal Politics in Turkey During the Özal Era (1983-1989). *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 12(4), 77-91.

<sup>100</sup> Interview.

<sup>101</sup> Yavuz, D. (1989). *Özal'lı Yıllar* (1. basım). Bilgi Yayınevi, 43.

<sup>102</sup> Uras, G. (1983, December 26). *Nokta*. The literal translation of the phrase he used was Özal Lovers Society (*Özal Sevenler Demeği*). Similarly, Yavuz Gökmen argues that all the Ministers and ANAP MPs in the early days were worshipping Özal. He also records an occasion when Minister of Culture Mükerrrem Taşçıoğlu, being asked whether ANAP MPs loved Özal very much, said to him, "How could I not love him. I was selling water pipes in the *Perşembe* Market? He made me Minister." The one-man show character of the ANAP was also so evidently demonstrated by the fact that, apart from Mr. M Keçeciler, Özal's close associate, and Mr. H. Doğan, Özal's nephew, the 30-odd founders of the ANAP, learned the name and the emblem of the party they were establishing just before the official establishment day. See Gökmen, Y. (1992). *Özal sendromu* (1. baskı). Verso Yayınları, 120, 135.

<sup>103</sup> Tutum, C. (n.d.). *Kamu Yönetiminde Yeniden Yapılandırma* (TESAV Publications). TESAV.



sector” and “transformation of the state,” they became evidence of increased “patrimonialization, politicization, and personalization of the state bureaucratic apparatus.”<sup>104</sup>

For instance, this was clear in the selection process of cabinet appointments. He was said to have appointed ministers without consulting the party, and this was supported by the fact that most of the newly appointed ministers learned of their appointments only after the cabinet list was released to the press.<sup>105</sup> Such practices were continued throughout his premiership despite growing uneasiness within the party and the Turkish public in general.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, among the legal reforms the first ANAP government implemented shortly after its formation was the establishment of powerful undersecretaries directly accountable to the Prime Minister. This move aligned with Özal’s campaign pledge to streamline the bureaucracy, reduce red tape, and enhance efficiency in decision-making. While creating these undersecretaries, tasked with specific responsibilities previously managed by various ministries, undoubtedly bypassed much of the bureaucracy and expedited decision-making processes, it also concentrated significant power in their hands. These undersecretaries, personally appointed by and answerable only to the Prime Minister, became more influential than the ministers. Consequently, this shift “undermined the principle of cabinet responsibility by placing virtually all the power in the hands of the Prime Minister and his entourage of undersecretaries.”<sup>107</sup>

Although this process eventually extended to encompass most of the bureaucracy, it was most extensive in reorganizing economic affairs – Özal’s primary focus and an area where he considered himself an expert. As such, the civilian cabinet became responsible mainly for all issues relating to the economy.<sup>108</sup> He established a new Secretariat for “Treasury and Foreign Trade” (*Hazine Dış Ticaret Müstesarlığı*), which oversaw foreign trade and foreign loans, banking, monetary policy, the stock market, foreign exchange, and public enterprises. In theory, this body was part of the Finance Ministry, but in practice, it operated independently and was more powerful and directly accountable to the PM. Additionally, Özal began his tenure with a substantial majority in Parliament and faced an ineffective opposition that offered neither substantial criticism nor viable alternatives. This situation

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<sup>104</sup> Farazmand, A., & Heper, M. (Eds.). (2019). The state and bureaucracy: The Turkish case in historical perspective. In *Handbook of Comparative and Development Public Administration*. Routledge, 1020.

<sup>105</sup> Uncular, B. (1991). *İşte böyle bir meclis: 1983 - 1991* (1. basım). Bilgi Yayınevi, 4.

<sup>106</sup> For example, after the 1987 elections, Mehmet Barlas wrote in the daily Gunes editorial on December 22, 1987, “...take the new Ministers in this latest Cabinet list, they learned their appointments only at the last minute like national lottery winners. Even themselves cannot explain who is appointed where on what grounds.” Even Özal’s brother Korkut Özal, who was not active in politics then, was critical of his anti-democratic actions within ANAP; “There is a party, and there is its leader, Turgut Özal. Anything and everything that has been done belongs to him. Nobody else is responsible either for rights or wrongs...The last word always rests with him. For instance, I heard and could not believe that in the latest local elections, all the 1300 mayoral candidates were chosen by the central committee, that is, Turgut himself. Can you imagine...?”. Interview by Nokta, April 23, 1989, 15, quoted in Aydın, 1994.

<sup>107</sup> Some saw this as a step towards American-style centralization in which undersecretaries, appointed by the political regime, not the Ministers, were in control. See Ahmad, F. (1985). The transition to democracy in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 7(2), 219.

<sup>108</sup> Heper, 1990; Ergüder, Ü. (2017). The Motherland Party, 1983-1989. In J. M. Landau & M. Heper (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (1st edition). Routledge.

led him to perceive himself as “without an alternative.”<sup>109</sup> As a result, he frequently bypassed the control of this compliant Parliament, or what remained of it, by extensively using governmental decrees, effectively ruling without oversight.<sup>110</sup> By analyzing declarations and speculations in the news by relevant political figures, it emerges how, although various factions within the party were unhappy with this process, they found it expedient to accept it as reality since they all needed Özal’s support to gain control of the party. Fully aware of this situation, he encouraged and exploited these divisions to strengthen his personal hold.<sup>111</sup>

Moreover, the press often reported during the 1980s that Özal made crucial decisions with his close associates, separate from the party or government bodies, often in informal settings, which became known as the “*Hanedan*” (Royal Family).<sup>112</sup> Özal challenged the traditional foreign policy-making in Turkey, which has traditionally been an elite-driven process, particularly in Turkey, where state officials (*memur*) have historically held high status in a hierarchical society. Indeed, since the 1870s, during the Tanzimat period – European-inspired reforms aimed at halting the Ottoman Empire’s decline – foreign policy elites have primarily been educated at state institutions.<sup>113</sup> As he put it:

In the past, the bureaucracy governed Turkey. I said no, it should be governed by elected people, not the bureaucracy...The issue is particularly salient in two places [the Finance Ministry and the MFA]...where you find graduates of the *Mülkiye* school. These people aspire to govern Turkey. They will never change. And this is our biggest problem.<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, Özal modified this elite mold in the early 1980s by disrupting the traditional hierarchy of the MFA and promoting a select group of rising diplomats to his office. As Ayman Güler notes, “the ‘imported’ princes who were interestingly young and American educated would lead the newly created organizations. These new paramount figures should have worked in the prominent

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<sup>109</sup> In an interview by Güneri Cıvaoglu, Güneş. October 2, 1986, [https://www.nadirkitap.com/gunes-gazetesi-1-ocak-1984-zeki-muren-muazzez-abaci-guneri-civaoglu-sakip-sabanci-muhtesem-gece-efemera19577292.html?srltid=AfmBOoq\\_eO7FIMrG4VLBF0mQn7C-4MAAAy-Q7W4eIGntBI-XxsCSvCC](https://www.nadirkitap.com/gunes-gazetesi-1-ocak-1984-zeki-muren-muazzez-abaci-guneri-civaoglu-sakip-sabanci-muhtesem-gece-efemera19577292.html?srltid=AfmBOoq_eO7FIMrG4VLBF0mQn7C-4MAAAy-Q7W4eIGntBI-XxsCSvCC)

<sup>110</sup> These figures were taken from research by SHP MP Mr. Cahit Tutum, cited in T.B.M.M. TUTANAK DERGİSİ. (1989, June 13). (TBMM-TD. 18-2, 29 (100).

<sup>111</sup> Özal’s belief in his one-man hold over the party was so self-evident in these remarks regarding party management; “Nobody knows what I do.” *Hürriyet*, August 14, 1989, quoted in Aydın, 1994, 257.

<sup>112</sup> For an analysis of the Hanedan phenomenon and its members, see Cemal, H. (2000). *Özal Hikayesi*. Everest Yayınları. For a scrutiny of informal practices, see Ozen, H. (2013). Informal Politics in Turkey During the Özal Era (1983-1989). *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 12(4), 77–91.

<sup>113</sup> Robins, 2014, 332. Originally established in Istanbul, this institution was akin to the elite, state-oriented educational institutions close to the French republican model. Eventually, the school was relocated to Ankara, where it became intellectually and morally anchored at Ankara University, where the insular nature of the foreign policy elite became even more pronounced during the Kemalist period. See also, Szyliowicz, J. S. (1971). Elite recruitment in Turkey: The role of the *Mülkiye*. *World Politics*, 23(3), 371-398; Pamuk, Ş. (2009). Türkiye’de tarım ve iktisadi gelişme. *Mülkiye*, 33(262), 63-76.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Gencer, Ö. (2012). Türkiye’de Siyasal Rejim ve Dış Politika: 1983–1993. In F. Sönmezoğlu, N. Özgür, Ö. Terzi, & Ö. Erler Bayır (Eds.), *Türk dış politikasının analizi*. Der Yayınları, 308.

international financial centers such as IMF, World Bank, and United Nations concerned units in the USA.”<sup>115</sup> By doing so, he aimed to ensure their loyalty to him personally rather than their adherence to the official line.<sup>116</sup> By assuming responsibility for foreign economic policy, the new Undersecretariat undercut the MFA, showcasing Özal’s propensity to bypass the diplomatic corps altogether and rely instead on business people as his intermediaries abroad.<sup>117</sup>

An additional dimension of the change introduced by Özal to TFP was his novel approach to conducting foreign affairs. While since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, this area had traditionally been managed by diplomats, Özal aimed to become the critical actor in both the decision-making and implementation processes of foreign policy. In his view, “elected politicians” should lead, with appointed diplomats supporting them” and that “rapid reforms, requiring flexible thinking and implementation, could not be achieved by bureaucrats who supported the status quo.”<sup>118</sup> Özal also began incorporating new actors with functional roles in diplomacy to emphasize stronger economic relationships. Turkish businessmen became central figures in carrying out their foreign policy tasks. Believing that foreign policy should facilitate Turkey’s integration into global markets, Özal often traveled with large delegations of business people during his official trips. On these visits, he leveraged his political influence to create commercial opportunities for Turkish entrepreneurs, remove legal barriers to foreign trade, and attract foreign investments into Turkey. For example, to counter the anti-Turkey activities of Armenian and Greek lobbies in the United States, Özal sought an alliance with the Israeli lobby. Before his 1985 visit to the United States, Özal sent Jewish-Turkish businessman Uzeyir Garih to Washington to secure meetings with key members of the Israeli lobby.<sup>119</sup> This was also in line with Özal’s emphasis on building personal relationships with global and regional leaders,

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<sup>115</sup> Güler, B. A. (1996). *Yeni sağ ve devletin değişimi: Yapısal uyarılama politikaları* (1. baskı). Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 61.

<sup>116</sup> Özer, B. (1998). Patrimonial Characteristics of Turkish Public Bureaucracy in the Özal Era [M.A. Thesis]. Bilkent Üniversitesi.

<sup>117</sup> “An experienced bureaucracy, particularly if comprised primarily of the Mülkiye graduates he could not stomach, was nothing more than an impediment to him. For this reason, under Özal, the hierarchy was turned upside down. Maybe some things were accomplished more rapidly, but state traditions were undone.” See Yavuzalp, E. (1996). *Liderlerimiz ve dış politika: Bir diplomat gözüyle* (1. basım). Bilgi Yayınevi ; Bilgi Dağıtım, 321-22. Özal suggested that they could best make themselves useful by looking after the foreign interests of the Turkish private sector. See Özal, 1991. In the words of one of his lieutenants: “The mon chers [a derisive reference to the French-speaking diplomats] were set to work. They resisted a little at first. ‘This is not our job,’ they said, ‘we do not run after the affairs of businessmen.’” Quoted in Mufti’s Interview with Ahmet Kurtcebe Alptemoçin, an ANAP cabinet minister under Özal. See Mufti, 2009, 60.

<sup>118</sup> Gülistan, G. (2016). Özal’ın Dış Politika Anlayışı. In İ. Sezal & İ. D. Dağı (Eds.), *Özal’lı yıllar: Siyaset, iktisat, zihniyet* (2. baskı). Beta, 296. Morton Abramowitz, the US Ambassador to Turkey in 1989, noted Özal’s approach to foreign policy when, during the crises of Bulgarian refugees, he suggested “Do not let the bureaucracy get hold of this and just do it.”. See, Abramowitz, M. (2013). Remembering Turgut Ozal: Some Personal Recollections. *Insight Turkey*, 15(2), 38. Another notable example of Özal’s efforts to sideline bureaucrats in foreign policy was his unilateral decision to remove the visa requirement for Greek citizens. He believed this move would encourage a significant number of Greeks to visit Turkey for business and tourism, improving Turkish-Greek relations. Initially, Özal asked Turkish diplomats and National Intelligence Agency officials to assess the potential impact. However, he ultimately acted on his own and announced the suspension of visa requirements for Greek citizens without waiting for further input from the bureaucracy. Yavuzalp, 1996, 263.

<sup>119</sup> Ertosun, E. (2016). Change and Leadership in Foreign Policy: The Case of Turgut Özal’s Premiership in Turkey, 1983–1989. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 27(2), 54.

preferring to address critical political issues through face-to-face meetings. For instance, although Ercüment Yavuzalp, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, disagreed with many aspects of Özal's foreign policy approach, he acknowledged his strong diplomatic connections:

Even if it is not to the extent that his flatterers claim, he had significant influence and credibility over his counterparts through his diplomatic contacts. It would not be wrong to say that he is one of the most popular Turkish statesmen in the international arena. He has been in constant dialogue with foreign leaders, including phone contact.<sup>120</sup>

Yet, although these political and institutional developments paved the way for new modes to implement TFP, it is equally important to recognize two parameters that contributed to shaping, legitimizing, and implementing a gradual change during the first Özal's era. Thus, the next section examines the role of various ideational factors and sociopolitical changes at different levels.

### **3.2.3. Özalism in Foreign Policy: Pluralist Identity and Multidimensionality**

Looking at how Özal's governments sought to change the civil-military balance and reformulate the decision and policy-making process within Turkish state bureaucracy helps to appreciate another connected aspect: "Özal's innovative political views prompted – but were also the product of – a social and cultural transformation that aimed to challenge the traditional hierarchical and tutelary political culture."<sup>121</sup> Indeed, with his peculiar liberal but also conservative and Islamist mindset, Özal began undermining the cultural pillars of the military guardianship model by breaking various taboos and proposing solutions to Turkey's longstanding domestic and foreign issues. As seen in the previous examination of the external dimensions of TFP, during the 1980s, TFP drew markedly closer to the Islamic world while, quite simultaneously, an Islamic reassertion was taking place in the domestic scene.<sup>122</sup> According to Aydın,

the most critical aspect of these developments lies behind the question of whether the new orientation in foreign policy was a deliberate extension of Islamic revival within the country or whether the revival was a natural outcome of Turkey's warmer relations with her Middle Eastern Islamic neighbors. The simple truth was that both developments occurred simultaneously and constantly reinforced one another.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Yavuzalp, 1996, 327.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with a Turkish expert of the period.

<sup>122</sup> Bacik, 2011; Cizre-Sakallioğlu, Ü. (1994). *Kemalism, hyper-nationalism and Islam in Turkey. History of European Ideas*, 18(2), 255-270.

<sup>123</sup> Aydın, 1994, 277.

As such, it is fundamental to highlight the context in which these conceptual elements emerged. The military government that arose after the 1980 coup was relentless in its opposition to Muslim fundamentalism, viewing it as a threat to the country's integrity comparable to communism. Indeed, the leader of the MSP, Erbakan, was calling on the Muslim nations to unite against both the Soviet Union and the United States and claiming that Turkey was a "tool" in the hands of the West.<sup>124</sup> Concurrently, the extreme sides of his party and its sympathizers were displayed in a rally for the "liberation of Jerusalem."<sup>125</sup> Then, on the day of the coup, Erbakan, the ultranationalist leader Alparslan Türkeş, and other former MPs were tried on charges of attempting to establish an Islamic state in Turkey.

Yet, although the military attempted to crack down heavily on fundamentalists, it nonetheless recognized the significant role religion could play in promoting the "unity and togetherness" of the people and in countering the influence of "foreign ideologies" on younger generations.<sup>126</sup> Despite their initial wariness of an Islamic resurgence, the military regime sought to use government-controlled religion as a means of depoliticizing the masses. They believed that the spiritual and mystical message of moderate Islam, which was also seen as an antidote to Communism, could best remedy an overly politicized society. Therefore, while all political and social groups faced significant pressure from the military regime, non-violent Islamist groups were treated with leniency and enjoyed considerable freedom in their activities. This new attitude towards religion by the military not only showed a growing rapprochement between the concept of the secular state of Kemalism and the social reality of famous Islam but also forged a new understanding of Kemalism by the state elites that aimed to keep the growth of Islam within certain boundaries to prevent it from posing a threat to the secular foundation of the Turkish state in the future.<sup>127</sup> Overall, this new understanding ultimately led to an unprecedented recognition of Islam as a religious and social phenomenon capable of restoring cohesion and unity within Turkey.

However, this perception and hope were misleading. Indeed, the military's tactic of leveraging religion to neutralize "harmful ideologies" by being lenient towards Islamic groups carried the risk of fostering societal radicalization, the very outcome they sought to avoid. As such, in 1983-1984, early indicators of the rising popularity of religious orders and diverse radical Islamic factions became

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Erbakan [n.d. date and place], Cumhuriyet, August 21, 1979, 6 cited in M. Bali Aykan, *Ideology and National Interest in Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Muslim World: 1960-1987*, PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1988, 328.

<sup>125</sup> During the rally organized by the MSP in the city of Konya on September 6, 1980, crowds sat down when the Turkish national anthem was played, insults to Atatürk and calls for the restoration of Sharia Law were made, and banners with Arabic script calling Islamic revolution in Turkey were carried. Milliyet, September 7, 1980.

<sup>126</sup> Bacik, G. (2011). The separation of Islam and nationalism in Turkey. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 17(2), 140-160.

<sup>127</sup> The military regime went further than any other government and, in the fall of 1981, made religious education compulsory, albeit by the lay teachers and under the strict control of the state." Pak, S.-Y. (2004). Cultural Politics and Vocational Religious Education: The Case of Turkey. *Comparative Education*, 40(3), 321-341.

apparent with a notable increase in the publication of Islamic magazines and translated books, facilitating the spread of radical Islamic influence from other regions of the Muslim world. Many reports highlighted that several brotherhoods were conducting subversive activities in their established underground centers and schools and made efforts to infiltrate the Turkish Armed Forces and the Police.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, by the end of their regime, the military leaders were already alarmed by the growing strength of Islamist movements. They realized that Islam was surfacing as an independent and oppositional political entity, prompting them to reassess their earlier confidence regarding the nation's future in the context of Islamic radicalism. In this setting, the “old-guard secularists” viewed the future of the state's secular nature with considerable pessimism after Özal and his party came to office. Their concerns were not entirely baseless, given his personal and political background.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, during his entire political career, there was ongoing suspicion about whether he was a liberal modernist – viewed by his supporters as somewhat revolutionary – attempting to integrate Islam within a secular, modern, and democratic Turkey to achieve a “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” or whether he was merely an Islamist in disguise, essentially another “Erbakan with a swallow-tail coat.”<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, Özal appeared somewhat satisfied with the current situation and consistently assured no significant threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey.<sup>131</sup>

In this sense, a main pragmatic move that prevented Özal from being demonized as his predecessors was his (re)interpretation of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. The synthesis was initially formulated during the 1960s by the Guild of the Enlightened (*Aydınlar Ocağı*) to conceptualize the shared beliefs and ideas of the right political ideas in Turkey. To simplify, this conceptualization posited that Islam uniquely appealed to the Turks due to several striking similarities between their pre-Islamic and Islamic cultures. Consequently, Turkish Islam was perceived as more tolerant, liberal, and democratic than other interpretations of Islam.<sup>132</sup> Ironically, to counter the communist threat, it

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<sup>128</sup> See Tank, P. (2005). Political Islam in Turkey: A state of controlled secularity. *Turkish Studies*, 6(1), 3-19; Sen, A. (2022). Three evils of citizenship education in Turkey: Ethno-religious nationalism, statism and neoliberalism. *Critical Studies in Education*, 63(3), 307-322; Kaplan, S. (2005). “Religious Nationalism”: A Textbook Case from Turkey. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 25(3), 665-676.

<sup>129</sup> He was known for his devout Muslim faith, had unsuccessfully run for deputy on the National Salvation Party (*Millî Selâmet Partisi*, MSP) list in the 1977 general elections, and had alleged family ties to Islamic circles. These connections included his close associate, Mr. Mehmet Kececiler, a former MSP mayor of Konya before the 1980 intervention, and his brother, Mr. Korkut Özal, who was also an MP for the MSP. Additionally, his apparent collaboration with former MSP and Nationalist Action Party (NAP) followers within his party raised doubts among secularists regarding his intentions.

<sup>130</sup> Çağlayangil, İ. S. (with Çılızoğlu, T.). (2007). *Kader bizi una değil, üne itti: Çağlayangil'in anıları* (3. basım). Bilgi Yayınevi, 23. Mr. Çağlayangil held many Ministerial portfolios in various Demirel governments, including foreign ministry, later became speaker of the Senate of the National Assembly, and was acting President of the Republic for six months before the 1980 coup.

<sup>131</sup> In one of the meetings of the Council of Ministers, headed by President Evren, Premier Özal, facing pressures again from the President, argued that according to a survey the ANAP had conducted, Turkish society is modern and looking ahead yet attached to its traditions and that the traditions should not be mistaken with reactionary actions. He also argued that the struggle against reactionary movements, if there were any, should be conducted with “scientific methods” rather than police actions for extracts from the meeting, dated 25 July 1986.

<sup>132</sup> Zürcher, E. J. (2017). *Turkey: A modern history* (4th ed). I.B. Tauris, 303.

was the military itself that promoted into the political discourse a stand of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, arguing that “the solution to Turkey’s problems encountered on the way to becoming a powerful country could be found only by the unity of Turkish nationalism and Islam.”<sup>133</sup> It also called for a realignment of religion and state, creating a moral, patriotic, and ordered society with Islamic consciousness, closer relations in foreign policy with Islamic states, and elimination, or at least control, of the atheists, materialists, communists, separatist, humanists, other religious groups, leftist, elitist and statist intellectuals. Drawing from and exploiting these intermingling elements, Özal proclaimed the ANAP as “nationalist and conservative” that could offer a “middle-way solution” for Turkey’s political and identity problems. Moreover, this can also be seen as a strategic response to the existing balance within his party, which was increasingly swinging into the control of the former MSP loyalists who were referred to as “*selametciler*” (salvationists) and of the ultranationalist sympathizers who were called “*hareketçiler*” (activists). Aware of their potential to undermine his government’s legitimacy, Özal seemed to satisfy the initial aim of the military’s changing approach towards Islam in Turkey: having religion as a state ideology in a secular setting.<sup>134</sup>

In light of these considerations, the foreign policy orientation under the Özalist leadership is often described as characterized by his determination “to depart from established policies, to take calculated risks, and to search for new alternatives and options.”<sup>135</sup> In his words, Turkey was “eager to contribute actively to all actions aimed at improving multilateral cooperation.”<sup>136</sup> Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that Özal was unhappy with the Kemalist establishment and its principles. His friend and follower Çandar argues that despite serving as Prime Minister and later as President of Turkey, Özal was fundamentally “an anti-state figure as he opposed almost all the regime’s principles dominating the state. Even as President, he stood against the state, and upon his death, he was buried not in a state cemetery but near those who were executed by the state, like Menderes.”<sup>137</sup> In this sense, Özal’s foreign policy gave room for a civilizationational turn markedly different from the Kemalist Western-centered model. This is because Özal himself embodied the people’s anti-Kemalist and anti-regime sentiments, questioning nearly all Kemalist principles,

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<sup>133</sup> Yeşilada, B. A. (1988). Problems of political development in the third Turkish Republic. *Polity*, 21(2), 345-372; Bursa-Millet, Z. (2023). The Intellectuals’ Hearth: A Republican Generation? In E. Zürcher (Ed.), *A Hundred Years of Republican Turkey: A History in a Hundred Fragments* (pp. 362–366). Leiden University Press.

<sup>134</sup> Phrase taken from Toprak, B. (2005). Islam and Democracy in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 6(2), 167–186.

<sup>135</sup> Sayari, S. (1992). Turkey: The Changing European Security Environment and the Gulf Crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), 18.

<sup>136</sup> Cumhurbaşkanı Turgut Özal’ın Körfez Krizi Konusunda Basın Mensuplarıyla Yaptıkları Sohbet Toplantısı (18 Ağustos 1990, Çankaya Köskü), Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1992, 257. Quoted in Ataman, M. (2002). Özal Leadership and Restructuring of Turkish Ethnic Policy in the 1980s. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38(4), 123–142.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Cengiz Çandar in Sever, M., & Dizdar, C. (1993). *Cumhuriyet Tartımları*. Baak. 103, <https://cemerogul.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/tc3bcrkiyenin-temel-sorunu-kemalist-devrimin-varim-kalmic59f-olmasidir.pdf>.

including secularism, etatism, nationalism, and populism, yet without undermining their importance for the Turkish culture and state. While Mustafa Kemal envisioned a Turkified, secular, Western-oriented society in Europe, Özal dreamed of a Muslim, democratic, liberal, capitalist society characterized by multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multi-religious aspects, with a secular state that respected and publicly recognized its citizens' cultural and religious differences.<sup>138</sup>

Contrary to the positivist views of the early Republicanists, Özal believed that Western civilization was not the only viable model and that Turkey did not have to choose exclusively between European, Turkish, or Islamic civilizations. For Özal, progress did not necessarily depend on adopting Western civilization. He viewed Turks as European Muslims, asserting that Turkey did not need to change its mentality or civilizational identity to be considered European. In his book "*Turkey in Europe, Europe in Turkey*," he argued that Turkey had always been, still was, and would continue to be a part of Europe.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, the fundamental difference between Kemal Atatürk's and Özal's approach to Europe was that while the former aimed to internalize European values, the latter did not see any inherent conflict between Turkish civilization and European identity. Özal attributed Turkey's backwardness to a lack of liberalism and scientific thinking rather than to religion and culture. He advocated for "*çağ atlamak*" (skipping an age), suggesting that Turkey could bypass the historical process of enlightenment experienced by the West and directly rely on its own path to benefit contemporary development.<sup>140</sup> In his view, this implied merging liberalism, human rights, democracy, and technological and scientific developments, considering that Turkish culture was not an obstacle to receiving all of them. Undoubtedly, the reason for this confidence was Özal's ideological background and economic performance, which led to more stability and co-existence between Islamic values and modernity.

The existing ties with the Western world and the ongoing relations with the Islamic world are complementary elements of our foreign policy. On the one hand, the geographical location, which acts as a natural bridge between the West and the Middle East, and the shared history and cultural heritage, on the other hand, requires Turkey to show great importance to the Islamic world.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> His friend and follower Cengiz Çandar spelled out the difference: "Republican secularism was inspired by French and Soviet atheism. Therefore, in the 1920s, Republican secularism became atheism. In time, Kemalist secularism became an anti-religious and anti-Islam concept. When Turkish Islam, rooted in the Ottoman and Seljuk Islamic cultures, was suppressed by the State, Arabic Islam, which is a less moderate, more radical version, became the leader in the world. Now, when Özal and I visited the Turkish communities in the Balkans, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Central Asia, in Azerbaijan, and in Kazakhstan, we saw a completely different Islam from the Arab version: a Turkified Islam. A more moderate Islam. An Islam which is suitable for liberalism and democracy. I mean, Turkish Islam is so different. Kemalists cannot accept that a country needs religion as well because their ideology was an imported ideology and not suitable for the Turkish cultural structure. We have to accept that Turkey is a Muslim country". Idem.

<sup>139</sup> Özal, 1991.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Heper, M. (2013). Islam, Conservatism, and Democracy in Turkey: Comparing Turgut Özal and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. *Insight Turkey*, 15(2), 146.

<sup>141</sup> Fidan, H. (2010). *1920-2010 Türk siyasi tarihi* (1.basım). Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 261.



As stated in this ANAP's first program, Özal's vision for TFP was based on the principle for which diverse identities and commitments could coexist harmoniously, even those often seen as opposing, such as the Western and Eastern blocs, traditional and modern lifestyles, and religious and secular societies. He viewed this pluralist identity as reflecting Turkey's history, culture, and geography, considering it a strength for its transformation and development. Regarding geopolitical identity, Özal saw Turkey as a bridge between the East and the West, viewing this geostrategic location as advantageous for future international political and economic roles. He frequently referenced Turkey as a "geographical and cultural bridge," highlighting its potential to establish multidimensional political and economic relations with various regions.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, The Eastern bloc, and the Soviet Union in particular, formed another critical area of interest for Özal in developing Turkey's economic relations, aligned with his multidimensional foreign policy approach. Despite the leaders of the 1980 coup maintaining negative views toward communism and the Soviet Union, Özal sought to move beyond the security-focused bloc politics of the Cold War, prioritizing mutual economic interests instead. He did not view the Cold War's bipolar system and the ideological rifts between the camps as barriers to economic cooperation. Instead, he characterized the diversification policy during his leadership as "spreading out the weight of Turkish trade" and political power.<sup>143</sup> Consequently, the first Özal government program aimed to foster friendship and economic cooperation with the Eastern Bloc based on the Helsinki Final Act (1975). As such, after his first year in power, Özal stated in a television appearance,

Today, Turkey is the number one country in the Middle East in all respects. As much as it does with the Western bloc, why shouldn't there be an exchange between the Eastern and Middle Eastern countries?<sup>144</sup>

To implement these ideas, Özal sought to eliminate bureaucratic barriers hindering the development of economic ties with other countries.<sup>145</sup> Shortly after forming his first government, he implemented reforms that allowed non-Turkish citizens to acquire property in Turkey and permitted Islamic financial institutions to operate within the country. These measures aimed to attract foreign capital and investments, particularly from the Persian Gulf. Additionally, Özal worked to improve relations with the Middle East and the Muslim world to repair Turkey's past negative image. He

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<sup>142</sup> See Laçiner, 2009.

<sup>143</sup> Özal, T. (1991). *Cumhurbaşkanı Turgut Özal'ın 21. Asır Türkiye'nin ve Türklerin Asrı Olacak Konulu Konuşmaları (22 Mayıs 1991, Bursa)*. Başbakanlık Basımevi.

<sup>144</sup> Özal, T. (1985). *Başbakan Turgut Özal'ın konuşma, mesaj, beyanat ve mülakatları: 13.12.1984—12.12.1985*. Başbakanlık; TBMM Kütüphanesi Açık Erişim Koleksiyonu. <http://hdl.handle.net/11543/3262>.

<sup>145</sup> See Laçiner, 2009; See also Ataman, M. (2005). Leadership Change: Özal Leadership and Restructuring in Turkish Foreign Policy. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 1(1).

publicly stated that the actions of the previous Turkish governments did not reflect the current attitudes and sentiments of the Turkish people.<sup>146</sup>

Domestically, President Evren was uneasy with Özal's foreign visits, especially since his first three trips were to Iran, Pakistan, and Libya – countries noted for their Islamic identity.<sup>147</sup> Despite these concerns, Özal emphasized that developing relations with the Middle East and the Muslim world was not intended as an alternative to Turkey's longstanding relationships with the West. He conveyed privately and publicly that these efforts did not signify a shift in Turkey's international orientation.

As Turkey possesses its worthy position in the Islamic world, it will become a country that increases its reputation and weight all around the world. In the same sense, we should not neglect that maintaining its credibility in the West will increase its worth in the eyes of the Islamic countries.<sup>148</sup>

Özal was also mindful of the concerns of many Middle Eastern countries and avoided projecting an imperialistic image. During his Libya trip in May 1984, he remarked, "I don't want to use the word leadership, but Turkey will assert its influence in the Islamic world."<sup>149</sup> He understood that seeking a role such as "leader or elder brother" could provoke adverse reactions among Arab leaders. He emphasized that Turkey aimed to be an influential actor based on mutual economic interests.

This type of caution was also present in his approach toward the West. While its discourses often appeared distant from a pure Kemalist pro-Western stance, Özal was mainly against the traditional skepticism of foreign policymakers in shaping a more active foreign policy. Indeed, he believed that Turkey could resolve its security issues through integration with Western countries, as both Turkey and Western nations sought to avoid conflict and instability. He also argued that joining the European Community would distance Turkey from the risk of war.<sup>150</sup> In line with this view, Özal persuaded Europeans to accept Turks as Muslim Europeans within the European political system. He also aimed to dismantle Turkish skepticism towards the Western liberalist model by reaffirming how integrating with the West would advance Turkey's democracy and economy.<sup>151</sup>

Lastly, the policies of the first ANAP government cannot be understood without considering that another central pillar of Özalism was his peculiar conceptualization of liberalism. In this sense,

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<sup>146</sup> Balcı, E. (1985, February 6). Cezayir ve Özal'ın Açıklaması. *Cumhuriyet*, 1, cited in Ertosun, 2016.

<sup>147</sup> Evren, K. (1990). *Kenan Evren'in anıları* (1. baskı). Milliyet Yayınları, 92-93.

<sup>148</sup> Özal, 1985, 13.

<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Ertosun, 2016.

<sup>150</sup> Özal, 1992, 343.

<sup>151</sup> "Political integration with Europe will further ease the institutionalization of democracy in the Turkish political system. A secular and pluralist culture has gradually taken root in Turkey. Integration with the EC will only enhance its ability to persist into the twenty-first century". Idem, 330-331.

Özal gave particular importance to individual rights in contrast to the Kemalist approach, which prioritized the state.<sup>152</sup> For him, Turkish cultural peculiarities and material interests were compatible, not contradictory. This was mainly due to its “economy first” principle: “Economic cooperation and interdependence would eventually lead to peaceful and beneficial political relations overriding domestic, regional, and bilateral conflicts.”<sup>153</sup> In this respect, Özal did not hesitate to use economic leverage whenever possible to gain political advantages in both international relations and domestic politics. For instance, he utilized large public contracts to help normalize relations with certain European countries – that had deteriorated under the military regime – and to energize the ties with the US “model.” This approach clarifies why, despite widespread criticisms, he insisted on taking hundreds of business people with him on state trips, believing that political relations could be improved through profitable business dealings.<sup>154</sup> However, Özal’s “economy first” principle in foreign policy also indirectly affected domestic politics because the development of democracy and fundamental human rights had to wait until the economy was on a solid path to growth.<sup>155</sup> As such, it appeared that Özal and his government had separated the economic and political aspects of liberalism. While advocating for economic liberalism, they largely ignored its political components. They maintained the political and human rights restrictions imposed by the military dictatorship, eventually becoming staunch defenders of the “September 12 regime.” The “no” campaign demonstrated such a stance on democratic principles before the 1987 referendum on political rights.<sup>156</sup>

This was also reflected in Özal’s view of Turkey’s European integration. For him, application for full membership begun in 1987 was a counterbalancing move against possible US dependency and a result of multilateral foreign policy. In other words, the Özal leadership expected the Custom Union to provide a dynamism that the Turkish state alone could not create.<sup>157</sup> Özal viewed European institutions and markets as a means to improve Turkey’s industrialization and economic development rather than a political objective. The Özal leadership attempted to change the MFA’s official position, according to which Turkey was an inseparable part of Europe in every aspect because he considered the application for full membership as interconnected with the domestic structure of the country in which they were competing with the Kemalist group.<sup>158</sup> By utilizing foreign policy dynamics, they

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<sup>152</sup> In 1979 Özal said: “A strong state does not mean a patriarchal state. The aim is not richness of the state but richness of the nation. If people are rich, it means that the state is rich. In economy or political spheres the state should not compete with the people, but support them. The people are not the servants of the state, but the state must be servant of the people. Sever & Dizdar, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>153</sup> Aydın, 1994, 238.

<sup>154</sup> Cited in Cemal, 2000, 115.

<sup>155</sup> Laçiner, 2009.

<sup>156</sup> Idem.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with a former negotiator for Turkey’s EU accession process.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with a former member of the MFA at the time.

tried to maintain a favorable balance of power in domestic politics. For Özal, Turkey needed to decrease its dependence on European countries since the European view of Turkey was biased due to its religion and historical background.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, membership in the European alliance pattern was not the only alternative for the Özal leadership. Özal acknowledged that if Turkey could solve its domestic cleavages, such as political Islam and the Kurdish problem, it would not matter whether to enter the EU or not. Furthermore, “still by keeping the priority of the European context, we have to attach great importance to the United States, Black Sea Economic Cooperation and East Asia.”<sup>160</sup> That is, the Özal leadership diversified its alliance pattern both within the Western and overall contexts. This approach would inevitably cause future complications in relations with domestic contestation actors and those Western countries sensitive to political and human rights developments in Turkey.

#### **3.2.4. Structural Social Changes: Public Opinion, Pressure Groups, and Minorities**

As mentioned earlier, the cadre of the 1980 coup sought to depoliticize society by limiting political activity to professional political groups and encouraging others to focus on non-political actions and the private sphere. This depoliticization restricted the press, associations, unions, and universities from expressing views that could harm national unity and order, including foreign policy matters. By the end of the military regime, the press focused on news rather than opinions, universities on teaching rather than research, workers’ unions on economic rather than political struggles, and other associations on self-interest rather than public interest. This enforced political inactivity resulted in a lack of genuine interest in foreign policy among these groups, even after the return to civilian rule.<sup>161</sup>

However, the economic boom under the reforms promoted by Özal brought about a fast and radical change in Turkey’s economic and social structures. Traditionally, economic power had been in the hands of the Kemalist bureaucracy and state-sponsored businessmen. Although the Menderes and Demirel governments made efforts to expand economic opportunities to the conservative areas of inner Anatolian and the Black Sea, it was with Özal’s policies that the periphery, villagers, workers,

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<sup>159</sup> Ataman, 2005.

<sup>160</sup> Özal, 1991, 35.

<sup>161</sup> For the difficulties of running a newspaper during the military regime and various examples of the prohibitions, see Alpay, Ş. (2010). Two Faces of the Press in Turkey: The Role of the Media in Turkey’s Modernisation and Democracy. In C. Kerslake, K. Öktem, & P. Robins (Eds.), *Turkey’s engagement with modernity: Conflict and change in the twentieth century*. Palgrave Macmillan.

and traditional religious groups entered the economy, and as a result, strengthened their autonomy against the core, namely the bureaucracy, the military, and the state-created industry.<sup>162</sup> Regarding the policy formulation role of business, the Özal's era again represented a significant break from the past. When Özal assumed office, established business associations were already in existence.<sup>163</sup> However, these organizations lacked an outward-oriented focus and the legal status required to effectively represent Turkey's private sector in foreign economic policy issues. Acknowledging the need for a formal platform, Özal actively encouraged the business community to create a new organization, which then became the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (*Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu*, DEİK) in 1986 as a legal entity under private law with the purpose to manage the foreign economic relations of the private sector and support concrete business development activities. This legal status enabled DEİK to participate in the policy formulation process directly, and it was eventually granted a seat in bilateral joint economic commission meetings held on an intergovernmental basis. Moreover, the fact that Turkey experienced profound multi-dimensional challenges in its economic, cultural, political, and social spheres in the mid-1980s created the basis for further future transformations in the nexus between "high politics" and "the people." Contrary to the conventional argument that economic reforms result in greater inequality, pro-Islamic merchants, industrialists, and trade unions supported economic liberalization and privatization because they undermined the monopoly of the upper classes and the state.<sup>164</sup>

The private sector in Anatolia managed to use political processes to create an independent economic base from which to play a role in politics. Indeed, these structural changes eroded the economic base of secularism. In contrast, new private economic power centers emerged and bolstered certain cultural and ideological groups, especially an emerging Anatolian middle class, which became known as the "Anatolian Tigers."<sup>165</sup> These conservative Anatolian and pro-Islamic entrepreneurs mainly consisted of first-generation college graduates who were the children of an Anatolian-based lower middle class. They benefited from Özal's neo-liberal economic policies, which increased their social mobility and which, in turn, allowed them to establish their medium and small-size firms. Most of them, born and raised in provincial towns and villages, only settled in Turkey's larger metropolitan centers after completing their college education. Those foundations provided the basis for a new cultural condition. The emergence of private schools and publications spurred new economic

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<sup>162</sup> Quoted in Atli, A. (2011). Business associations and Turkey's foreign economic policy: From the 'Özal Model' to the AKP period. *Boğaziçi Journal Review of Social, Economic and Administrative Studies*, 25(2), 171-188.

<sup>163</sup> Two prominent ones were the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (*Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği*, TOBB) founded in 1950, Economic Development Foundation (*İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı*, IKV) founded in 1965 and the Turkish Industry and Business Association (*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği* - TÜSİAD) founded in 1971.

<sup>164</sup> Quote, Atli, 2011.

<sup>165</sup> Filiztekin, A., & Tunalı, İ. (1999). Anatolian Tigers: Are They for Real? *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 20, 77-106.

opportunities for the conservative cultural elite, who gradually became the agents tasked with reconstructing memory and inducing new signs of nostalgia for Turkey's Ottoman and Islamic past, thus functional for concrete policies.<sup>166</sup> A clear example is the creation in the early 1990s of the Association of Independent Businessmen (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*, MÜSIAD) as the expression of the views of pro-Islamic small and medium-sized industrialists and business groups.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the revival of social, economic, and cultural foundations to protect people in need; religious groups established most. In other words, groups on opposite sides of the debate concerning Turkish national orientation toward the West or the Islamic world contested the political and economic terrain. In addition to association life and the increasing political power of the provinces, the media, and mass education, they played a crucial role in diversifying the bureaucratic elite. The Islamist groups used the media to disseminate their ideas and to challenge the policies of the state. The market share of Islamic journals and newspapers rose by 30% between 1980 and 1991, with 110 weekly and monthly Islamist journals in circulation.<sup>168</sup> The relatively open press entered famous life, setting up new communication networks, offering new options for the citizens, and providing new means of shaping public discourse. One of the significant implications of this high circulation has been creating an independent financial basis for the emergence of a new autonomous intellectual elite beyond state control. Consequently, the Turkish government could no longer set the political agenda by itself and could not shape the public discourse as it did in the past.<sup>169</sup>

For what concerns public opinion, Özal's understanding of economic development and his motto of saving the middle classes (*orta direği kurtarmak*) were his catchphrases during the election campaign, as he knew that the Turkish people cared about their economic well-being more than anything else.<sup>170</sup> Besides, he enjoyed popularity among different voting bases thanks to his success in economic affairs in the early 1980s. Therefore, "it was logical in a sense that he should tie everything else, including the democratic evolution and foreign policy of the country, to the economy's first principle."<sup>171</sup> Put aside the discussion about whether this represented a "full restoration of democracy" in the 1980s, it is undeniable that rising incomes and expanded economic opportunities allowed political, ethnic, and religious minorities to become more visible, powerful,

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<sup>166</sup> Yavuz, M. H. (2016). Social and Intellectual Origins of Neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a Post-National Vision. *Die Welt Des Islams*, 56(3–4), 454.

<sup>167</sup> European Stability Initiative. (2005). *Islamic Calvinists: Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia*. [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_document\\_id\\_69.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_69.pdf)

<sup>168</sup> *Turkey: The Elusive golden apple*, The Economist, 8 June 1996, 7. Quoted in Yavuz, 1998.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with a journalist.

<sup>171</sup> Interview.

and able to influence Turkey's domestic and foreign policies. While many of these communities had been Islamized and Turkified, they maintained their languages and distinct identities. A perception of democratization and adequate economic growth enabled these minorities to establish lobbying organizations, publishing houses, and connections with political parties. These groups became crucial supporters of major political parties, offering financial aid and voter support.<sup>172</sup> With Azerbaijanis and Chechens being particularly active, another significant group of Balkan migrants, who had settled in provinces like Bursa, Adapazarı, and Istanbul, formed a substantial pressure group.<sup>173</sup> Central Asian groups, such as Kazaks, Uygur Turks, Kyrgyz, and Afghanis, also moved to Turkey following various upheavals, including the communist revolution in China and the Soviet occupation. These ethnic groups significantly impacted foreign policy, pushing for more sensitive and engaged relations with their regions of origin. Their influence would later become more evident in Turkey's involvement in conflicts like the Bosnian War (1992-95) and the Nagorno-Karabakh (1992-94) dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These ethnic pressure groups began to develop foreign policy objectives distinct from the state's traditional Kemalist stance. Therefore, as seen earlier, Turgut Özal recognized this shift and aimed to craft a foreign policy addressing these diverse sectors' demands.<sup>174</sup>

While the 1980 coup had augmented the general lack of public interest in foreign policy, the emergence of these groups also impacted how public opinion perceived certain external events. Notably, these were "emotionally charged issues" that captivated the entire nation, such as the repression of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and Western Thrace or the proposed Armenian resolutions in the US Congress. Indeed, during the second half of the 1980s, as Turkey experienced political and societal normalization, public opinion, the press, and specialized associations began to show increased interest in the country's foreign relations.<sup>175</sup> Commercial unions and industrialists, particularly, were committed to Turkey's full membership in the EC. They consistently pressured the government to continue its liberalization and export-oriented economic policies, which required strong economic relations with Western Europe and neighboring countries.<sup>176</sup> During this period,

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<sup>172</sup> Laçiner, S. (2001). From Kemalism to Ozalism. The Ideological Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy [PhD Thesis]. King's College, 9.

<sup>173</sup> This group included Albanians, Bosnians, Pomaks, and Bulgarian and Macedonian Muslims, many of whom arrived during the Ottoman period or through population exchanges with Greece in the 1920s. The ethnic cleansing campaign in Bulgaria during the 1980s forced approximately 300,000 Bulgarian Turks and Muslims to migrate to Turkey, making the Balkan community one of the most influential lobbies in the country.

<sup>174</sup> Laçiner, 10.

<sup>175</sup> See Kaplan, S. (2006). The pedagogical state: Education and the politics of national culture in post-1980 Turkey. Stanford University Press.

<sup>176</sup> See Yaka, Ö. (2015). Hegemony in the making: TÜSİAD's Hegemonic Role in the Context of Turkey's EU Membership Process. *Spectrum: Journal of Global Studies*, 7(1), 91-114; Ugur, M., Canefe, N., & Serap, A. (Eds.). (2004). Europeanisation of Turkish peak business organisations and Turkey-EU relations. In *Turkey and European integration: Accession prospects and issues*. Routledge.

Turkey's relations with Greece, followed by the Cyprus issue, received the most attention in the press, accounting for about one-third of all foreign affairs news coverage. Next in line were Turkey's relations with the US, Western Europe (including the Council of Europe and the EC), the Middle East (including the Iran-Iraq wars), and other regions. Institutions such as the Foreign Policy Institute, the Foundation of Economic Development (*İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı*, İKV), The Guild of the Enlightened (*Aydınlar Ocağı*), and the Association of Political Science Faculty Graduates (*Mulkiyeliler Birliği*), along with universities, played a significant role in shaping Turkey's policy through conferences, meetings, and publications.<sup>177</sup> At the same time, in this context of increased pluralism, the gradual reassertion of Islamic values in society and their broader recognition by the state contributed to a more open and receptive attitude towards Islamic countries, paving the way for closer contacts with the Middle East and for an increased positive reputation of Turkey's external policies.<sup>178</sup>

However, despite Özal's ability to elaborate a hybrid and more inclusive political discourse and to substantiate it through economic and social growth, the relaxing political atmosphere also unleashed sociopolitical cleavages that had traditionally remained unsolved within the Turkish sociopolitical milieu. Above all, it was the fact that the long-lasting Kemalist nationalism disappointed many Kurdish nationalists since the time the Republic was born. As a Turkist, Atatürk aimed to create a homogeneous nation by eradicating ethnic and cultural differences from the state apparatus, leading to broad repression of Kurdish identities. Islam had previously been a unifying factor between Kurds and Turks, but the secular and nationalist Republicans undermined this bond, leading to ongoing unrest in the region.<sup>179</sup> While the Kurdish separatists had long been too weak to instigate a large-scale rebellion, the anarchic environment of the 1970s allowed them to unite and push for independence or autonomy. However, it was in the early 1980s that the separatist Kurdish movement became a significant political and armed force when the PKK was established in 1984 under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan. As will be seen in the next chapter, by the late 1980s, the Kurdish issue dominated the political agenda, prompting all political parties to seek a solution to the fact that Kemalist Turkish identity no longer satisfied some segments of Turkish society.

Kurds and other ethnic and political groups (Islamists, socialists, etc.) began demanding a new definition of identity and citizenship that would include ethnicity, culture, religion, political ideas,

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<sup>177</sup> Toprak, B. (1995). Civil Society in Turkey. In Norton (Ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East, Volume 2* (pp. 87–118). BRILL.

<sup>178</sup> See, for example, *Milliyet*, July 20–22, 1991, *Kıbrıs Dosyası*”; *Milliyet*, September 27–October 1, 1992, *ABD'nin Kurt Kartı*. All quoted in Aydın, 1999.

<sup>179</sup> Among many, see Çandar, C. (2020). *Turkey's mission impossible: War and peace with the kurds*. Rowman & Littlefield; Yeğen, M. (2007). Turkish nationalism and the Kurdish question. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 30(1), 119–151; Gunter, M. M. (1999). *The Kurdish predicament in Iraq: A political analysis*. London: Macmillan.



and minority languages. During his premiership, Özal stressed several times that the foundational principles of the Republic, especially Turkish citizenship, unity, individual rights, and the state's rights and responsibilities, needed to be reconsidered.<sup>180</sup> Although Turkey's human rights record remained one of the worst among members of the Council of Europe, under Özal's premiership, in January 1987, the Turkish government recognized the competence of the European Commission of Human Rights to receive applications from individuals or non-governmental organizations claiming to be victims of a violation by the Turkish state. Among Özal's bold initiatives was the unbanning, in January 1991, of the use of the Kurdish language in public and the celebration of the Kurdish New Year.<sup>181</sup> For many, this was not only prompted into action by a concern with human rights per se, but he also saw the problem as a symptom of "a deeper malaise in Turkish politics."<sup>182</sup> Özal's goal was to increase the sphere of freedom enjoyed by the Kurds to undercut the popular support enjoyed by the PKK as he was "convinced that the granting of cultural rights, combined with economic incentives, was the only realistic solution to the Kurdish problem."<sup>183</sup> As Turkey was a remnant of a multiethnic empire that had not interfered with the intra-community affairs of different ethnic and religious communities, Özal saw "cultural pluralism" and "decentralization" as essential prerequisites for resolving some of Turkey's long-standing social and political ills. In his view, "was the Ottoman legacy of political governance."<sup>184</sup> According :

Özal's contribution to improving Turkey's human rights record was no less significant than his contribution to transforming Turkish politics and economy. One should always bear in mind that, in implementing his policies, Özal was surrounded by forces of status quo and, therefore, had to act with great caution and restraint. His success indeed lies in his capacity to bend an extremely rigid system without inviting violence.<sup>185</sup>

However, one should also note that the European context played a crucial role in pushing Özal to implement an adaptation of a reform package that abolished Articles 141, 142, and 163 of the penal code outlawing Communist and Islamist political activities (1991). As such, this might leave open the discussion about whether this democratic opening was a sign of Özal's genuine concern with human rights or more an outcome of European pressures and part of preparations for the Turkish application to the EEC to be made a few months later. In any case, the translation of his vision into practice and his focus on the "economic first principle" did not match the deeper societal and identity

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<sup>180</sup> Aral, B. (2001). Dispensing with tradition? Turkish politics and international society during the Özal decade, 1983-93. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37(1), 72-88.

<sup>181</sup> Ataman, 2002; Gunter, M. H. (2010). Turgut Özal and the Kurdish question. In *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey* (pp. 105-120). Routledge. See also an interesting interview available at <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/Xrm6KHM0HrXvVJ4p/>.

<sup>182</sup> Gunter, 2010.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with an MP of a pro-Kurdish party.

<sup>184</sup> Idem.

<sup>185</sup> Laçiner. 2009, 165.

cleavages such that, within a decade, the PKK would then amass around 10,000 armed fighters and thousands of sympathizers within and outside Turkey, undermining Özal's political legitimization based on a multidimensional and multi-identity conceptualization.<sup>186</sup>

Ultimately, the combination of these factors also helps to understand a striking peculiarity of this period: all the parties, which had representation in either the 1983 or 1987 Assemblies, had agreed on the need for Turkey to follow more active or dynamic foreign policy. Indeed, the public debate, the parties' political manifestos, and official records of the time reveal a shared dissatisfaction with the precedent "inactive" foreign policy and a strong desire for change. There was a precise determination to diversify and expand Turkey's relations, even with countries whose domestic systems or foreign policy orientations differed from Turkey's, such as Islamic and Communist nations. This shift towards a more dynamic foreign policy stance was also a reaction to the recent domestic dynamics, where weak coalition governments often led to an unproductive and passive foreign policy. Overall, domestic changes and international dynamics contributed to this new willingness among political parties to pursue détente in international relations. Furthermore, restructuring Turkey's economy to align with a free-market system, a goal shared by all major parties, relied heavily on export earnings and foreign investments, necessitating excellent and stable relations with all countries, especially regional ones. Another common point among the parties was Turkey's membership in the European Economic Community (EEC). When Turkey, under the ANAP government, applied for full membership in 1987, only fringe parties, representing about 10-12% of the electorate, openly opposed it. This can be seen as a result of Özal's political intuitions. First, as Öniş noted, "by effectively exploiting this hybrid ideology, ANAP under Özal's leadership could appeal to both the center and the periphery, ending the elite versus non-elite divide in Turkish society."<sup>187</sup> Second, another thing to observe was his ability to reconcile contradictory elements and establish harmony between them. That is, the fact that "ANAP consisted of four different political wings (liberals, conservatives, social democrats, ultranationalists) is a testimony to Özal's appetite for accommodation."<sup>188</sup>

This can be read as the ultimate consequence of the post-1980 coup atmosphere. The fragmentation of the Kemalist secular bloc and the re-Islamization of Turkish national identity had been co-occurring as a result of the expansion of mass communications, higher education, and the promotion of an official "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" as a new state-fostered ideology to de-politicize Turkish

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<sup>186</sup> Among others, see Gurses, M. (2018). *Anatomy of a civil war: Sociopolitical impacts of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey*. University of Michigan Press; Rumelili, & Çelik, 2017.

<sup>187</sup> Öniş, 2004, 120.

<sup>188</sup> Berdal 2001, 73.

society and achieve a new societal consensus.<sup>189</sup> As mentioned earlier, the military and the following government's official attempt to

create a new ideological consensus for unifying a Turkish society faced with growing sectarian, ideological, and ethnic differences should not be seen merely as a by-product of the 1980 military coup but rather as a broader 'process of self-searching' among the masses.<sup>190</sup>

In this process, which resulted from the failure of the earlier and novel Republican secularist and statist ideology, Islamic meanings were imposed on historical events and institutions to consolidate Turkish nationalism. In other words, "Islam has been reinterpreted and reincorporated gradually and subtly into official Turkish nationalism."<sup>191</sup> In the words of Yavuz, this process can be seen not only as an Islamization of Turkish nationalism but also as the Turkification of the Islamic tradition."<sup>192</sup>

Although the 1980 military coup leaders were responsible for opening only one type of religious school, known as Imam Hatip high schools, they made religious courses compulsory in public schools to generate a more coherent shared cultural framework of national identity and loyalty to the state. Moreover, the 1980 coup resulted in the firing of over one thousand university professors of largely leftist orientation, and a new generation of scholars with provincial and often traditional Islamic backgrounds were hired to fill vacant positions in provincial Anatolian universities.<sup>193</sup> Thus, not only elementary education but also higher education witnessed drastic Islamization.<sup>194</sup> As new graduates entered the scene, the Turkish secular elite lost its previous dominance and coherence in political affairs, struggling unsuccessfully against Özal and his reforms. The Özal years marked the first time the Turkish government truly reflected the nation's diversity and cultural pluralism.

This new elite, embodying more traditional cultural values, posed a threat to the political status and values of the Kemalist elite, who responded by criticizing Özal's government for challenging Atatürk's secular legacy and empowering Islamist elements. The ascendance of this pro-Islamic elite to higher positions in the economy, culture, and bureaucracy was set to influence state policies significantly in the 1990s. This group plays a critical role in re-evaluating the Republican legacy and constructing a new Ottoman-Islamic identity.

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<sup>189</sup> Idem.

<sup>190</sup> Yavuz, 1998, 13.

<sup>191</sup> Taha Parla, quoted in ESTÜDAM. (2018). *Yakın Tarihi Dergisi*. 1(3).

<sup>192</sup> Yavuz, 1998, 13.

<sup>193</sup> See Szyliowicz, J. S. (1969). Education and political development in Turkey, Egypt, and Iran. *Comparative Education Review*, 13(2), 150-166.

<sup>194</sup> Idem.

### 3.3. The Individual Level

As covered in the theoretical section, this research relies on the possibility of coexistence and interaction – rather than mutual exclusion – between the agency and the structure. In devising and implementing foreign policy, leaders must work with existing domestic institutions while responding to the external environment. In other words, foreign policy behaviors emerge after political leaders have assessed domestic and international factors.<sup>195</sup> This implies that “[w]ithout environments that are pervious to human intervention, even the most gifted leader can make no mark”<sup>196</sup>, evident when looking into Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy changes in the 1980s. This does not mean the exclusion of leadership in foreign policy analysis, but to assess not just “*whether* [individuals and personalities] are relevant, but *how* they are relevant.”<sup>197</sup> The central hypothesis is that individuals matter as much as national and international conditions allow them to matter.” In light of these considerations, this section will not just analyze the figure of Turgut Özal and the sole agent in shaping TFP during this period. Instead, it also ponders the importance of understanding the broader psychological atmosphere concerning the traditional and emerging Turkish political class after the 1980 military coup and the subsequent restructuring, limitations, and desires for change.

#### 3.3.1. The Özal factor in the 1980s

Although the role of one single agent should not be overstated, it is undeniable that the personality of Turgut Özal himself played a crucial part in shaping a new way of conceiving, elaborating, and conducting politics in Turkey. Zürcher noted, “he had a foot in more than two camps.”<sup>198</sup> On the one hand, he was a successful private industry manager in the 1970s. He was very well connected in big business circles, which liked his liberalization of the economy. On the other hand, he was known to have connections with the Nakşibendi order of dervishes. For Aral, “two peculiarities of his background increased his popularity during his Presidency: he was a civilian, and he was religious.”<sup>199</sup> These qualities have been a rare breed among Turkish Presidents since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. As people near him noted, “Özal was a missionary who wanted to mastermind an Islamic renaissance in Turkey by blending religious tolerance with modern science

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<sup>195</sup> Taliaferro, et al. 2009, 7.

<sup>196</sup> Greenstein, F. I. (1998). The impact of personality on the end of the Cold War: A counterfactual analysis. *Political psychology*, 19(1), 1-16, 2.

<sup>197</sup> Kelman, H. C. (1970). The Role of the Individual in International Relations: Some Conceptual and Methodological Considerations. *Journal of International Affairs.*, 24(1), 2-4.

<sup>198</sup> Zürcher, 2012, 297.

<sup>199</sup> Aral, 2001, 76.

and knowledge.”<sup>200</sup> According to Laçiner, Özal was a religious, nationalist, conservative, liberal politician, businessman, economist, and bureaucrat.<sup>201</sup> Most importantly, he was a moderate who could engage with individuals from diverse social and ideological backgrounds. Indeed, Özal’s influence extended beyond just two areas of the Turkish society. He was not only a successful businessman and a religious individual with ties to religious sects, but he was also an accomplished bureaucrat with solid connections to the IMF, the World Bank (serving as an adviser from 1971 to 1973), and the US administration. A key aspect of Özal’s identity was his Americanism. Indeed, after graduating from Istanbul Technical University in 1950 as an electrical engineer, he studied in the United States, where he became an admirer of American liberalism. He believed that the United States owed its success to its liberal values and argued that the Ottoman Empire shared similarities in its political structures, as both allowed different cultures and gave people the freedom to practice their religion, nationality, and economic preferences.<sup>202</sup> After returning to Turkey, Özal engaged in politics in the AP, the main center-right party of that time, and in the 1970s, he ran as a candidate for the Islamist NSP. Between 1967 and 1971, he led the state planning organization. After the 1980 military intervention, he was given the post of economy Minister in the cabinet formed by the junta as a transition government. In 1983, he founded the ANAP, which embodied the four political wings: conservatives, liberals, social democrats, and nationalists, and then became PM. He repeated this election success in 1987 and remained in office until 1989 when he was elected President.<sup>203</sup>

While being ambitious, Özal can be defined as a “realist idealist” since he was aware of the constraints before him.<sup>204</sup> First, he needed to take control of the foreign policy wheel from the hands of the traditional foreign policy actors, the military and foreign policy bureaucracy. Özal carefully took steps on this matter at first as Kenan Evren, the leader of the army coup, took up the Presidency and closely monitored politicians.<sup>205</sup> According to Çakmak, Özal, known as a conservative and devout believer, formed relationships with Muslim countries based on mutual economic interests rather than religious solidarity, and he did not exhibit typical Islamist behaviors in his political life and leadership.<sup>206</sup> His lifestyle and admiration for America set him apart from being an Islamist or traditional conservative. During his six years as Prime Minister and nearly four years as President until his sudden death in 1993, his foreign policy decisions focused on promoting economic ties

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<sup>200</sup> Interview.

<sup>201</sup> Laçiner. 2009, 6.

<sup>202</sup> Acar, F. (2002). Turgut Özal. In M. Heper & S. Sayarı (Eds.), *Political leaders and democracy in Turkey*. Lexington Books.

<sup>203</sup> Çakır, 2014, 194

<sup>204</sup> Ülgül, 2024, 23.

<sup>205</sup> Idem.

<sup>206</sup> Çakmak, A. (2021). *History, Discourse, and Policy in Modern Turkey* (Vol. 95). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

among regional countries and increasing interdependency to reduce conflict risks.<sup>207</sup> Gözen contends that Özal's interest in and ambitions toward Islamic countries were as strong as his engagement with the Western world.<sup>208</sup> However, others argue that his approach to Muslim states was opportunistic rather than emotional. His foreign policy vision and implementations centered on three fundamental principles: active, multi-dimensional, and economy-oriented.<sup>209</sup> Turgut Özal criticized the cumbersome bureaucratic system in TFP and advocated for a more active approach. During his time in office, he engaged with various institutions within Turkey's foreign policy-making circles, such as the army, the MFA, and Prime Minister Demirel.<sup>210</sup> As a biography published one year before Özal's death put it:

The Turkish elite never warmed to the Özals. From the day they assumed office until now, the Özals have been a subject of secret ridicule for this circle .... [because] Özal is an ugly and mustachioed man and [his wife] Semra Özal dresses up exaggerated. The Turkish elite did not view the Özals from Malatya as fit for the Prime Ministry or Çankaya [the Presidency], which in its heart it reserved for blond, French-speaking Istanbulites.<sup>211</sup>

However, as it will be analyzed in the following chapter, disagreements with the institutional structure of foreign policy-making, particularly the army and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, limited his ability to realize his vision entirely.

### **3.3.2. The Psychological Factor in the post-1980 Coup Atmosphere**

As Hermann et al. argue, when several autonomous bodies form an ultimate decision unit, foreign policy decisions must be taken with consensus among those units.<sup>212</sup> In this sense, to understand how TFP changed during the Özal governments, one also has to widen the angle of analysis to the psychological factors that allowed one single political figure to implement concrete steps within a strong state apparatus. First, Aydın highlights that “feelings of guilt and apologetic behavior” were prevalent among the political elite due to their involvement in the pre-1980 turmoil and being deliberately identified by the military as primary contributors to that disorder.<sup>213</sup> Consequently, in the Great Assembly, MPs were notably inclined to compromise in their arguments

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<sup>207</sup> Laçiner, 2009, 7.

<sup>208</sup> Gözen, R. (2009). İmparatorluktan küresel aktörlüğe Türkiye'nin dış politikası. *Palme*, 156.

<sup>209</sup> Özyılmaz Kiraz, B. (2022). Multidirectionality(ies) in the Turkish Foreign Policy: Compensatory, Complementary and Reactive Multidirectionality. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(3), 558–581.

<sup>210</sup> Çakır, 2014, 195.

<sup>211</sup> Mufti, 2009, 58.

<sup>212</sup> Hermann & Hermann, 1989.

<sup>213</sup> Aydın, 1999, 213.

or attitudes in favor of the government. Additionally, having been publicly criticized as self-serving and, by implication, unpatriotic and having faced prolonged persecution, the professional politicians' self-esteem was considerably low. Furthermore, the experience of being subjected to repeated vetoes and eliminations before the elections, effectively appointing their positions as elected, likely influenced the MPs' behavior for some time. These findings indicate that the 1983 Parliament in Turkey hosted an overwhelming proportion of "non-professional" political actors. Indeed, the inexperience of the deputies hindered the Parliament from exercising its already limited powers. Due to the legal prohibition that barred most pre-1980 politicians from politics for five to ten years and the threatened veto for anyone affiliated with pre-1980 parties, the new party founders were compelled to seek candidates who were previously inexperienced, uninterested, or even unqualified for politics.<sup>214</sup> Consequently, in the first Parliament after the 1983 elections, only 15% of all deputies had previous Parliamentary experience, and only 9% had served as national deputies.<sup>215</sup>

Additionally, the formation of parties in 1983 by individuals who had not previously been involved in any political establishment meant that most deputies were appointed to office due to personal favor or connections with the party leader.<sup>216</sup> Therefore, personal connections and the gratitude of MPs to their leaders, particularly within the ANAP, which held the majority in Parliament, reinforced the Prime Minister's influence over the Parliament through his party. This dynamic also strengthened the loyalty of ANAP deputies to Özal, who had established himself as a capable politician and leader, and many of them remained loyal to him throughout. Similarly, the high turnover of MPs in the 1987 early general elections meant that the same patterns of inexperience and loyalty also persisted. The lack of Parliamentary institutionalization, due to the deputies' inexperience, combined with Premier Özal's control over the ANAP deputies, who held a Parliamentary majority, enabled his governments to sidestep "every issue that the Motherland Party leaders did not wish to tackle" in Parliament, including foreign policy matters.<sup>217</sup> Examining the Parliamentary records for indications of Parliamentary oversight, particularly in foreign policy, reveals frequent complaints from opposition MPs about the government's evasion of Parliamentary decision-making, its reluctance to provide information on developments in Turkey's international

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<sup>214</sup> This was particularly true for the ANAP, which could not attract many experienced politicians at first because it had widely believed that it would not be allowed to run in the elections, and, even if it did so, would not get too far. See Heper, M. (1990). The state, political party and society in post-1983 Turkey. *Government and Opposition*, 25(3), 321-333. See also, Çandar, C. (2013). Turgut Özal Twenty Years After: The Man and the Politician. *Insight Turkey*, 15(2).

<sup>215</sup> Kalaycıoğlu, E. (1988). The 1983 Parliament in Turkey: Changes and Continuities. *State, Democracy and the Military: Turkey in the 1980s*, 51-58, 51. The first figure includes all the deputies who served in all the national Parliamentary bodies, including the 1961 Constituent and 1981 Consultative Assemblies. If we exclude the above-mentioned assemblies from our calculation, it would give the result of only 9% of all the deputies having served previously in the multi-party Parliaments.

<sup>216</sup> Idem.

<sup>217</sup> Heper, 1990,332. Also, for a more general question of party loyalty in the 1983 Parliament, see Kalaycıoğlu, 1988, 56-58.

relations, the difficulty MPs faced in obtaining answers to questions, the insufficiency of those answers, and the lack of debates.<sup>218</sup> The information provided by FMs to the assemblies regarding foreign policy needed to be more consistent. Although FM Halefoğlu updated the Parliament approximately every two weeks during the 1983 Assembly, this practice became less frequent in the 1987 mandate. A review of the records reveals that the Özal government only once agreed to present its comprehensive foreign policy program to the Parliament for general debate beforehand.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, the government often avoided providing detailed information about foreign policy issues, the reasons behind them, and the governmental actions, delaying disclosure until Parliament and public opinion pressured them. Consequently, one of the most common complaints about the government's foreign policy handling during the 1983 and 1987 legislative sessions was the "secrecy" surrounding foreign relations.<sup>220</sup> Apart from his tactless remarks, during his period in office, Özal also made frequent speeches touching on foreign policy issues and offered concessions in specific policy matters without consulting the foreign office.<sup>221</sup> Some attributed this attitude to Özal's impulsiveness and pragmatism. He preferred to see concrete results as quickly as possible and disliked bureaucratic procedures that tended to delay progress. An ANAP party leader remarked, "Because of his rush. He knows that if he follows official channels, it will take time. But our premier likes to put his ideas into action first thing in the morning."<sup>222</sup> His former mentor, Demirel, provided another perspective:

He doesn't like paperwork. He likes new things and enjoys experiments. Every day, he wakes up with new inspirations but doesn't like further calculations. Therefore, he usually jumps to a conclusion. He can take off the plane but cannot land it.<sup>223</sup>

Consequently, Özal's foreign policy was marked by sudden turns and twists, characterized by rapid decision-making and hurried speeches. This attitude also highlights his desire for swift results and

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<sup>218</sup> For example, only three out of twenty-two requests for general discussion or Parliamentary inquiry about the government's foreign policy in 1983 and 1987 Assemblies were accepted and debated later. Two of those admitted were tabled by either government Ministers or ANAP MPs. The three were the general debate on 11.2.1986 about the government's general foreign policy; the general debate, in closed session, on 13.2.1985 about the repression of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria; and the general debate on September 2nd, 1986, about Turkish military operations in Iraq, which tabled earlier by the government. There were none accepted in the 1987 Assembly. See TBMM-TD. (1986, January 17). *TÜRKİYE BÜYÜK MİLLET MECLİSİ*. [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak\\_dergisi\\_pdfler.birlesimler?v\\_mecelis=1&v\\_donem=d17&v\\_yasama\\_yili=3&v\\_cilt=](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak_dergisi_pdfler.birlesimler?v_mecelis=1&v_donem=d17&v_yasama_yili=3&v_cilt=)

<sup>219</sup> TBMM-TD. (1986, January 18). *TÜRKİYE BÜYÜK MİLLET MECLİSİ*.

<sup>220</sup> TBMM-TD. (1986, November 2). *TÜRKİYE BÜYÜK MİLLET MECLİSİ*. For selective complaints, see items from TBMM-TD. (1986, March 17). *TÜRKİYE BÜYÜK MİLLET MECLİSİ* on.

<sup>221</sup> MFA officials, for example, learned one day from the press, together with the rest of the country, that the Prime Minister had suggested four-sided (Greece, Turkey, Greek, and Turkish Cypriots) meetings to solve the Cyprus problem and also announced the abolition of visa requirements for Greek citizens. Cemal argues that the abolition of visas was initially suggested to Prime Minister Özal by a newspaper owner, Mr. Haldun Simavi, before his second press conference, where he made the announcement. The reason was apparently that "calling a press conference to announce goodwill is not good enough by itself; you have to have something important to say or to give." See Cemal (2000), 107.

<sup>222</sup> Tercuman, Y. D. (1987, May). *Vitrin*. The Diplomatic Pulse. <https://diplomaticpulse.org/en/>.

<sup>223</sup> Interview reprinted in Cemal, 2000, 107, 108, 110.



low regard for bureaucratic red tape and legal constraints. He frequently overstepped his legal boundaries during both his premiership and Presidency. While his pragmatism was a positive characteristic of his foreign policy, particularly during his premiership when he had more power and freedom, it also led to occasional conflicts with the foreign ministry, which valued ideological and legal principles in policy planning.<sup>224</sup> Undoubtedly, alongside Özal's personal diplomacy, his persuasive language played a crucial role in advancing Turkey's foreign relations. For instance, in the early 1980s, Özal visited several European capitals to brief Turkey's creditors on the country's recovery efforts and successfully convinced them to postpone repayment of Turkey's debts. Internal British documents describe Özal's program as a "radical but realistic solution to Turkey's problems" and assessed his presentation as "persuasive."<sup>225</sup> Another personal characteristic of Özal was his "off-the-cuff" speeches. His sudden ideas, announced without consultation with officials or further proper thinking, frequently resulted in embarrassment for the MFA, which was often left alone to deal with the situation afterward.<sup>226</sup> In this context, Özal once wrote that idealism was not his political creed and that he aimed to "work out what is possible and feasible within the constraints of a given system."<sup>227</sup> His pragmatism and desire for quick results often led him to rely on personal connections rather than official channels, reflecting his overall relaxed governing style and distrust of the formal system. He believed bureaucracy created formalities to expand its influence over government machinery and society. He argued that foreign policy should not be left to bureaucrats primarily interested in preserving the status quo.<sup>228</sup> However, this approach sometimes caused discomfiture for the MFA and problems for Turkey due to the complex nature of foreign policy issues that the end of the Cold War would bring about.

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<sup>224</sup> Ülgül, 2024, 9.

<sup>225</sup> United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Cabinet Official Group on Turkey. (1980, February 28). *Aid to Turkey*. MISC 31 (80) 5.

<sup>226</sup> One of his biggest blunders was his handling of the problem of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. While bargaining was going on behind the scenes under Soviet mediation, he, quite unexpectedly and apparently outside the knowledge of foreign ministry, announced in the heat of a political meeting that Turkey would accept every Turk Bulgaria chose to send, and was quite untactful, to say the least, in adding: "...they are called Bulgarian pigs. They are sending people without their belongings. We will take them; we will get their belongings with force. They can't do anything. In reality, Zhikov is in limbo. We are pressing, so don't worry; their actions will stick in their throats. I will force Zhikov to the negotiation table. I will bang his head. They are afraid of the Russians, too. They will listen to them. We saw the Bulgarian bluff. I told them to send the Turks. They were not expecting this; they were bewildered. Don't worry; we will take all of them." Quoted in Aydın, 1994, 242.

<sup>227</sup> Özal, T. (1987). Turkey's Path to Freedom and Prosperity. *The Washington Quarterly*, 10(4), 161.

<sup>228</sup> Laçiner, 2001, see Conclusions.

## 4. TFP CHANGE: BETWEEN THE ÖZAL AND THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

### 4.1. The External Level

#### 4.1.1. The Impact of Polarity Change

The rapid collapse of the Cold War system marked a transformative period in international relations.<sup>1</sup> Although occurring within a short period and surprisingly without inciting interstate wars or significant bloodshed, this event ushered in several fundamental changes.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, it reshaped the dynamics between superpowers, diminishing the threat of interstate conflict and nuclear standoffs. Secondly, the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union heralded the apparent end of communist regimes. Thirdly, the areas of geopolitical competition were redrawn with the emergence of new independent states in Europe and Asia as a direct result of the Soviet Union's fragmentation. Additionally, the demise of the Cold War era facilitated the global spread of liberal values such as democracy and free-market economics. The removal of the communist threat in Europe spurred the European Community's expansion, strengthened the Western alliance's cohesion, and witnessed Berlin gradually reemerging as an influential actor.<sup>3</sup>

However, this also meant that, although the sources of instability in the world mainly remained the same – such as nationalism, ethnic and religious motives, economic disputes, and inequalities – the end of the Cold War system made it more challenging to contain regional conflicts worldwide. This is because this watershed occurrence had profound systemic consequences, fundamentally altering the structure of international relations.<sup>4</sup> The collapse of the bipolar world system, which had

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<sup>1</sup> The end of the Cold War is a disputable topic. For instance, Westad focuses on five different “endings”: Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, Enrico Berlinguer's Eurocommunism, Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution in Iran, the Soviet “non-invasion” of Poland after the rise of Solidarity, and Ronald Reagan's reversal – in the mid-1980s – of his previous confrontational attitude towards the Soviet Union. Westad maintains that “the re-establishment of German foreign policy, the transformation of west European communism, the emergence of political Islam, the decline in the Soviet will to intervene, and the domestic political successes of the United States neo-conservative movement all had a determining influence on how and when the Cold War ended.” See Westad, O. A. (2005). *The global Cold War: Third World interventions and the making of our times*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Halliday, F. (1994). The Cold War and its conclusion: Consequences for international relations theory. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Post-Cold War Order: Diagnoses and Prognoses* (pp. 11–28). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the EC, led predominantly by the Franco-German partnership, assumed a more influential role in global politics than its standing during the bipolarity of the Cold War. See Dockrill, S., & Dockrill, S. R. (2005). *The end of the Cold War era: The transformation of the global security order*. Hodder Arnold.

<sup>4</sup> Lebow, R. N., & Risse, T. (Eds.). (1995). *International relations theory and the end of the Cold War*; [a 1991 conference...at Cornell University]. Columbia Univ. Press.

defined global politics for decades, necessitated a significant shift in the foreign policies of major powers.<sup>5</sup> With the dissolution of this bipolarity, the US emerged as the predominant global power, shaping a new order based on unipolarity. In such a structure, from an International Relations perspective, a unipolar system is defined as a single state possessing far greater capabilities than all other significant actors on the global stage.<sup>6</sup> Yet, historians also agree that this period was

part of the general transition to a unipolar world, in which not only can Third World countries no longer maneuver for benefits between two competing Great Powers, but many feel compelled to adjust to US policies to receive needed aid and benefits from the United States that they can no longer hope to get from the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding Turkey, it has been argued that “perhaps no other country outside the former Soviet bloc has seen its strategic position more radically transformed by the end of the Cold War.”<sup>8</sup> From a Turkish angle, the end of the Cold War brought numerous challenges, changes, and opportunities. It can be argued that while maintaining a relatively stable ground in the bipolar world, Turkey had to experience a process in which it switched from passivity to activism in terms of foreign policy by the beginning of the post-Cold War era.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, contrary to the bipolar systems in which more minor powers tend to align with significant powers, this period forced Turkey to adapt its policies and strategies to the new international conditions.<sup>10</sup> This transition had substantial repercussions for global and regional politics, introducing new actors into the international arena and compelling states to adjust to the new balance of power.<sup>11</sup> For Turkey, these changes brought challenges and opportunities, necessitating a shift from a passive, dependent foreign policy to a more active, independent stance.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, while Turkey’s strategic importance was primarily defined by its geography during the Cold War, the post-1989 situation diminished its role as a southeastern bastion of the NATO alliance. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the communist threat, Western nations began to question Turkey’s importance as a security partner, given that its primary role was to deter the Soviets.<sup>13</sup> However, this period also presented new opportunities

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<sup>5</sup> Rosati, J. A., Hagan, J. D., & Sampson, M. W. (1994). *Foreign policy restructuring: How governments respond to global change*. University of South Carolina press.

<sup>6</sup> According to Ikenberry, the international system became unipolar, with the United States as the sole pole. He bases this conclusion on the USA’s unmatched material capabilities and its role as a provider of liberal structures, acting as a hub around which other states must operate within a liberal world system. See Ikenberry, G. J. (2012). *Liberal leviathan: The origins, crisis, and transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Keddie, N. R. (1992). The End of the Cold War and the Middle East. *Diplomatic History*, 16(1), 96. For a similar account, see Garthoff, R. L. (1992). Why Did the Cold War Arise, and Why Did It End?. *Diplomatic History*, 16(2), 287-293.

<sup>8</sup> Mortimer, E. (1993). Active in a New World Role’ in Turkey, Europe’s Rising Star; The Opportunities in Anglo-Turkish Relations: Vol. published for the Turkish Embassy, London. Lowe Bell Communications, 44. Quoted in Aydın, 1999, 499.

<sup>9</sup> Çakır, 2014, 141.

<sup>10</sup> Mearsheimer, J. J. (1990). Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War. *International Security*, 15(1), 5–56.

<sup>11</sup> Bacik, & Aras, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Altunışık, 2009; Müftüler-Baç, 1996; Sayarı, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with an expert of Turkish-Russian and Soviet relations.

for Turkey to increase its influence, particularly at the regional level.<sup>14</sup> In general, this shift necessitated a rethinking of foreign policy objectives both in Turkey and within the Western alliance regarding Ankara's place in global security frameworks. Consequently, Turkey began seeking a new role defined by its geostrategic location amidst regions of potential instability.

This need for readjustment in terms of security was not just linked to material and structural factors, as a realist perspective would suggest. Instead, in this period, "Turkey's geopolitical anxiety was structured by the fear – real or imaginary of exclusion from Western values/identity that claimed that Turkey did not belong to Europe and the security structure and highlighted that Turkey lost its strategic significance for the West because of the dissolution of the Soviet Union."<sup>15</sup> As Hale recognizes, "both in Turkey and abroad, the post-Cold War situation sparked off a quite unprecedented debate regarding where Turkey's international future lay, in which a wide variety of views were expressed."<sup>16</sup> During 1989-90, some commentators suggested that the end of the Soviet threat had diminished Turkey's international influence, as it was no longer the cornerstone of Western security in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> It was also argued that NATO might lose its importance and be replaced by alternative security structures.<sup>18</sup> In this context, Turkey could be perceived as a strategic and political liability rather than an asset to the West. Strategically, Turkey faced numerous complex regional security concerns that were not necessarily shared by Western powers. Politically, Turkey's non-membership in the European Community, its internal Kurdish issue, its poor human rights record, and conflicts with Greece further complicated its standing.<sup>19</sup> Ankara's leaders often portrayed the country as a bridge between Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. However, "there was a risk that Western Europe might prefer to see Turkey as a barrier against a hostile 'other,' excluded from European structures."<sup>20</sup> In the absence of closer ties with Western Europe, it was suggested that Turkey might seek new opportunities elsewhere, such as in post-communist Russia or the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Black Sea.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in relations with Turkey's "near abroad," another contrasting vision emerged in the early 1990s.<sup>22</sup> Based on a highly securitized approach, this perspective recognized the end of the Russian threat but maintained that potential enemies still surrounded Turkey and emphasized the need for a vigilant and suspicious

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<sup>14</sup> Aybet, G. (2006). Turkey's long and winding road to the EU: Implications for the Balkans. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 8(1), 65–83.

<sup>15</sup> Yeşiltaş, 2013, 667.

<sup>16</sup> Hale, 2012, 135.

<sup>17</sup> Öniş, Z. (1995). Turkey in the post-Cold War era: in search of identity. *Middle East Journal*, 49(1), 48–68; Yanık, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> See Sayar, 1992, 10–11.

<sup>19</sup> Hale, 2012, 136.

<sup>20</sup> Discussion with a Turkish expert on Turkey-Russia and Soviet relations.

<sup>21</sup> Fuller & Lesser, 2019. At the time, Lesser elaborated his argument in a paper: Lesser, I. O. (1999). Turkey's strategic options. *The International Spectator*, 34(1), 79–88.

<sup>22</sup> Hale, 2012, 137.

attitude towards all neighboring countries, with national security as the paramount concern. In a 1996 article, Şükrü Elekdağ, a former Under-Secretary at the Turkish MFA and Ambassador to Washington, argued that Turkey still faced the danger of a “two and a half front war.”<sup>23</sup> These critics argued that a high rate of military expenditure was partly due to the military’s influential role in internal politics and the necessity to combat the PKK and confront Greece over Cyprus – situations that more flexible policies might have mitigated.<sup>24</sup>

Conversely, more moderate perspectives argued that Turkey’s connections with the West remained crucial for both parties. The end of the Cold War was not entirely negative for Turkey, as its new opportunities complemented its Western ties rather than conflicting with them.<sup>25</sup> The idea that Turkey might pivot away from the West towards a “Middle Eastern” or “Turkic” identity, driven by opportunities in Central Asia and other regions, was challenged by those who emphasized that these new opportunities were not contradictory or competitive, but complementary as an “integral component” capable of enhancing its relations with the Middle East and Central Asia.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, an active policy beyond Europe was deemed necessary for Turkey, suggesting that Ankara “should simultaneously look to both the East and the West and embrace the fact that Islam is an important part of its cultural heritage.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, the following section seeks to make sense of how such necessities and ideas were implemented in different areas.

#### **4.1.2. The Emergence of Turkey’s New Areas of Interest**

What is indisputable is that the conformation of a different international system rendered the world riskier and more unstable and generated many regional conflicts that were previously appeased within the Cold War system. This new system displayed an unsteady ground where the formation of new alliances could easily be modified according to the newly arising problems.<sup>28</sup> This is because the international system became a complex structure in which hierarchical and multicentered foreign policy behaviors intertwined with power relations.<sup>29</sup> In other words, this meant that while breaking

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<sup>23</sup> Elekdağ, S. (1996). Two and one-half war strategy. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 1(4), 57. The two main fronts were Greece and Syria, which might act in concert, and the “half front” was the internal struggle against the PKK. Elekdağ also described Turkey as being “besieged by a veritable ring of evil.”

<sup>24</sup> See an untitled commentary here, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/817262>.

<sup>25</sup> See the comments by Bülent Ecevit in *Cumhuriyet*, 27 December 1989, and Winrow, G. M. (1993). NATO and the out-of-area issue: the positions of Turkey and Italy. *Il Politico*, 631-652. From a Turkish perspective, see Aybet, G. (1999). NATO’s new missions. *Perceptions*, 4(3).

<sup>26</sup> Henze, Paul B. “Turkey: Toward the twenty-first century.” In *Turkey’s New Geopolitics*, Routledge, 2019, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Öniş, 1995, 48-9.

<sup>28</sup> Gönlübol, M. (1992). Yurtta barış cihanda barış. *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 9(25), 9-26.

<sup>29</sup> Öniş, 1995.

points in international politics were primarily based on the ideological camps of the Cold War period, new fault lines along geopolitics, geo-economic, and geo-cultural features emerged worldwide.<sup>30</sup> As this period saw the emergence of sub-systems in world politics, explanations based on regionalization began to be considered crucial because regions' importance increased at the end of the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> This pressure, stemming from the change in the system, necessitated states to give weight to regional security issues. On the one hand, states in different geographical areas started investing in regional security arrangements to cope with the challenges created by security regionalization. On the other hand, from a US perspective, regional security alliances and systems acquired more importance in maintaining regional stability with lower costs. As such, "if global-triggered concerns and resentments cause reactions defined about regional actors and issues, the resulting constellations can easily be regional."<sup>32</sup> In coherence with this thesis's definition of "areas of interests" in Turkish Foreign Policy, it is here accepted that in the post-Cold War world, "the regional level stands more clearly on its own as the locus of conflict and cooperation for states and as the level of analysis for scholars seeking to explore contemporary security affairs."<sup>33</sup> According to Buzan, this approach can be superficially seen as a post-Cold War focus rooted in two assumptions: the decline of superpower rivalry reduces the penetrative quality of global power interest in the rest of the world; most of the great powers in the post-Cold War international system are now "lite powers," meaning that their domestic dynamics pull them away from military engagement and strategic competition in the trouble spots of the world, leaving local states and societies to sort out their military-political relationships with less interference from great powers than before.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, what follows is a consideration of the significant developments in Turkey's areas of interest, conceived not as monolithic geographical areas but as regional security complexes where different geographies remain connected by security, ideological, and economic drivers.

#### **4.1.2.1. Central Asia and The Caucasus**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union had a direct impact on the rise of the new republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus. This gave Turkey many opportunities to expand its regional influence

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<sup>30</sup> Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2020). From Cold Wars to new wars. In C. Jones & C. Kennedy-Pipe (Eds.), *International security issues in a global age: Securing the twenty-first century* (1st ed., pp. 9–27). Routledge; Pells, R. (2003). Culture wars, old and new. *Diplomatic History*, 27(3), 415–418.

<sup>31</sup> Lake, D. A., & Morgan, P. M. (Eds.). (1997). *Regional orders: Building security in a new world*. Pennsylvania State University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Buzan, & Wæver, 2003, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Lake, & Morgan, 1997), 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Buzan, & Wæver, 2003, 10.

through an activist foreign policy and threats that limited its ambitions for the following periods.<sup>35</sup> Until the late 1980s, Turkey's relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus were almost absent due to Moscow's capability to minimize contact between Turkey and the Turkic peoples under its control. For its part, Turkey strictly adhered to Atatürk's policy that defined Turkish national identity exclusively concerning the Turks living within the country's borders and ruled out the possibility of irredentism.<sup>36</sup> The independence of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan marked a significant turning point that allowed TFP to go beyond shared ethnic and cultural bonds and to favor more pragmatic policy goals of expanding political, economic, and cultural connections. The leaders of these newly independent Turkic states looked to Ankara as a critical intermediary for integrating into the global political and economic systems, hoping that Ankara's strong ties with Washington would help secure US support for their efforts.

Turkish policymakers embraced the opportunity, believing that strengthening ties with these new republics would bolster Turkey's regional influence, counterbalance Russian and Iranian expansion in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and provide new economic and business opportunities that could support Turkey's export-driven growth strategy.<sup>37</sup> The emergence of the Caspian region as a potentially major global energy supplier and Turkey's increasing demand for natural gas significantly influenced Turkey's quest for a more significant regional role. A key objective of Turkish policy was to secure new energy sources to meet its needs and reduce its energy dependency on Russia. Moreover, political and strategic factors also shaped Turkey's approach because Turkish policymakers saw Caspian energy development as crucial to the geopolitical competition with Russia and Iran for regional influence.<sup>38</sup> This ambition to become an energy hub was also linked to the fact that Turkish officials believed that establishing Turkey as the central link in the proposed East-West energy corridor for exporting Caspian gas and oil to Western markets would enhance its strategic importance to Europe and the United States. Turkey sought closer political and diplomatic ties with the energy-rich Caspian states, especially Azerbaijan, to achieve its objectives. In 1994, the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) joined a consortium of oil companies and the government of Azerbaijan (AIOC), which was formed to extract oil from the Caspian Sea fields. Turkey signed several bilateral and multilateral agreements with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan to increase its gas imports. At the same time, Turkey became deeply involved in intense competition to construct

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<sup>35</sup> On Turkey's relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus, see Sayarı, S. (1995). Turkey, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In A. Banuazizi & M. Weiner (Eds.), *The new geopolitics of Central Asia and its borderlands* (pp. 175–196). Indiana Univ. Press.; Aydın, M. (2004). Foucault's Pendulum: Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus. *Turkish Studies*, 5(2), 1–22.

<sup>36</sup> Aydın, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Sayarı, 1994, 180.

<sup>38</sup> Cornell, S. E. (1999). Geopolitics and strategic alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 4(2).

pipelines to transport Caspian energy to Turkey and Western Europe. Producing states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan), neighboring countries (primarily Russia, Turkey, and Iran), Western oil companies, and the US have been actively seeking to influence the choice concerning routing new pipelines. In the 1990s, Ankara spent considerable diplomatic energy, particularly in Washington, to promote the construction of a pipeline from Baku in Azerbaijan to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan as the principal transit route for exporting Azeri oil to Western markets. Washington has supported the Baku-Ceyhan project since it is concerned that Russia would increase its political and strategic leverage in the region if it controls the pipeline routes. Furthermore, cooperation between Washington and Ankara on Caspian energy issues was one of the significant items on the agenda of US-Turkish bilateral relations in the 1990s.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, however, Turkey's efforts to expand its influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia yielded mixed results. One main reason is the outbreak of ethnic and secessionist conflicts in Georgia,<sup>40</sup> Nagorno-Karabakh,<sup>41</sup> and Chechnya<sup>42</sup>, which heightened Turkish concerns about stability and energy security in the region. The proximity of these conflicts to Turkey's borders, involving Turkic and other Muslim peoples with whom Turkey had historic ties, raised fears of instability spilling over into Turkey. These conflicts presented Ankara with challenging policy dilemmas, particularly regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh war, where Armenians occupied one-fifth of Azerbaijan's territory. Additionally, the secessionist movements in Georgia and Chechnya had implications for Turkey's Kurdish separatist issue, and Ankara was wary of appearing to support separatism abroad while suppressing it at home<sup>43</sup>. Despite these challenges, Turkey opted for caution, avoiding involvement in the Caucasus' ethnic conflicts to prevent a major confrontation with Russia. What hindered Turkey's aspirations were factors such as Turkey's limited material resources, lack of shared borders (except with Azerbaijan), the significant Russian presence in the region, and the reluctance of the Turkic republics' leaders to depend on another country after decades of dependence on Moscow.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Iran also emerged as a rival to Turkey in the Caucasus, with their different political systems competing to represent themselves as models for the new states. Iran cooperated with Russia and Armenia to counterbalance the Ankara-Baku axis.<sup>45</sup> Özal initiated a strategic focus on the Turkic world by adding a new section to the Foreign Ministry and establishing well-funded institutions like the then Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve*

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<sup>39</sup> See Iskit, T. (1996). Turkey: a new actor in the field of energy politics?. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 1(4).

<sup>40</sup> Kotchikian, A. (2004). The Perceived Roles of Russia and Turkey in Georgian Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 6(2), 33–44.

<sup>41</sup> Cornell, S. E. (1998). Turkey and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: a delicate balance. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34(1), 51-72.

<sup>42</sup> Kuzio, T. (1995). The Chechnya crisis and the 'near abroad'. *Central Asian Survey*, 14(4), 553-572.

<sup>43</sup> Aydın, 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Interviews with two policy experts based in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

<sup>45</sup> Calabrese, J. (1998). Turkey and Iran: Limits of a stable relationship. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 75-94.



*Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı, TİKA*).<sup>46</sup> He frequently visited the Turkic Republics and, by 1993, had signed numerous agreements with them in areas such as health and education. Bilateral committees and organizations were also formed. Turkey offered around ten thousand scholarships to university students from the Turkic world and sent some Turkish students to these countries. Turkish national television, TRT, began broadcasting in the region under the name Avrasya (Eurasia), and other private stations followed suit. Turkish Airlines established regular flights to major cities like Baku, Alma Ata, Tashkent, Ashgabat, and Bishkek. Turkish Eximbank and other banks provided approximately \$7 billion in credits to Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, countries like Georgia and some Turkic autonomies in the Russian Federation benefited from Turkish aid. Özal also encouraged Turkish businessmen, religious groups, Turkists, and media to invest in these regions. This led to a significant influx of Turkish entrepreneurs and idealists who set up businesses, particularly in education, media, telecommunications, and textiles. The ultra-Turkist and Nurcu religious groups, led by Fethullah Gülen, also established a presence in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, with Gülen's daily newspaper, *Zaman*, becoming one of the leading newspapers in these countries.<sup>47</sup>

Özal's disappointment arose from his failure to recognize the political, cultural, and philosophical differences among the newly independent Turkic republics, which required thorough understanding. He approached these republics as if no significant cultural or conceptual divides existed between Turkey and each republic. Özal and the political establishment saw the Turkic republics as a homogeneous group in need of Turkey's guidance as the "big brother."<sup>48</sup> This paternalistic approach ignored the unique histories, ethnic and cultural characteristics, political traditions, and collective aspirations of each republic. Turkey's emphasis on promoting the "Turkish model" – secularism, a free-market economy, a Western-oriented external outlook, and multi-party politics – showed a lack of genuine engagement with these countries.<sup>49</sup> Özal and his establishment seemed indifferent to the republics' potential wariness of "foreign" models, given their negative experiences with the Soviet communist system. He focused on economic assistance and foreign investment as primary tools for expanding Turkish influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This

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<sup>46</sup> Todorović, M. (2021). TİKA's Heritage Restoration Projects. *Insight Turkey*, 23(3), 141–156. JSTOR, 141.

<sup>47</sup> Fidan, H., & Nurdun, R. (2008). Turkey's role in the global development assistance community: the case of TİKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency). *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 10(1), 93-111; Kubicek, P. (1997). Regionalism, nationalism and realpolitik in Central Asia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 49(4), 637-655; Özdalga, E. (2000). Worldly asceticism in Islamic casting: Fethullah Gülen's inspired piety and activism. *Critique: Journal for critical studies of the Middle East*, 9(17), 83-104; Balci, B. (2004). Between Sunnism and Shiism: Islam in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. *Central Asian Survey*, 23(2), 205-217.

<sup>48</sup> Efeğil, E. (2008). Turkish AK Party's Central Asia and Caucasus policies: critiques and suggestions. *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2(3), 166-172.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a former Turkish diplomat in the area.

pragmatic and self-centered approach, combined with a lack of understanding, significantly contributed to Turkey's declining influence and prestige in these regions.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.1.2.2. 5.1.2.2 *Middle East and North Africa*

The formulation of a modern Turkish identity was partly the reason for the move away from the Middle Eastern character of Turkey. The traditionalist elements of the Turkish identity were closely sealed in a Pandora's box, which was reopened at the end of the Cold War. Since the dissolution of the Empire, the relationship between Turkey and the states of the Middle East has become more complex, formal, and differentiated.<sup>51</sup>

Whether the above statement holds true or is just an exaggeration, it aptly describes that, with the collapse of the USSR, a significant power vacuum emerged in the Middle East and that, from a Turkish perspective, signified a changing balance of power in the region.<sup>52</sup> For instance, while Syria lost Moscow as its long-term protector, Iran and Iraq found themselves "vulnerable to the United States' 'dual containment' policy."<sup>53</sup> Seemingly, the loss of communist support for Palestine weakened the Marxist elements of the independence movement and facilitated the rise of Islamist radicals. In this shifting scenario, Israel emerged as a relatively more robust state in the region. In contrast, Iraq vocally supported the Palestinian cause during the 1987 Intifada, and Saddam Hussein's anti-American and anti-Israeli campaign increased his popularity, justifying a military build-up as necessary to balance Israel and protect Palestinians.<sup>54</sup> It is also essential to recall that Syria had already confirmed its alignment with Iran. Therefore, when Saddam Hussein supported General Aoun's Maronite Christians in Lebanon and attempted to rally Arab states against Syrian control in 1988, Tehran and Damascus cooperated to coordinate Shiite movements like Hezbollah to follow an anti-Baghdad policy. In addition, fora like the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) emerged to counterbalance this Syrian-Iranian nexus. Against this backdrop, when, on August 2, 1990, the Iraqi forces occupied Kuwait, the US formed an "Arab coalition" with Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, leading to Operation Desert Storm.<sup>55</sup> From Ankara's

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<sup>50</sup> Aral, B. 2001.

<sup>51</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 1996.

<sup>52</sup> Uslu, N. (2006). Türk dış politikası yol ayrımında: Soğuk Savaş sonrasında yeni sorunlar, yeni imkânlar ve yeni arayışlar (1. basım). Anka Yayınları.

<sup>53</sup> Sabet, A. G. (1999). Dual containment and beyond: Reflections on american strategic thinking. *Mediterranean Politics*, 4(3), 69-103.

<sup>54</sup> Goodarzi, J. M. (2009). Syria and Iran: Diplomatic alliance and power politics in the Middle East. Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>55</sup> Cleveland, W. L., & Bunton, M. P. (2016). *A history of the modern Middle East* (Sixth edition). Westview Press, 478. By October 1990, over 200,000 US troops were in Saudi Arabia, with additional forces from Britain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Canada joining Operation Desert Shield.

perspective, “this coalition of Arab states against Iraq signified increasing American influence in the region, yet in a different fashion.<sup>56</sup> the Gulf War prompted the Gulf States to sign bilateral defense agreements with the US, Britain, and France. This would also pave the way for American involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace.<sup>57</sup>

The Gulf War represented a watershed within this intricate context for the region and Turkey. Under President Özal’s leadership, Ankara joined the US-led coalition, taking a firm stand against Saddam Hussein’s regime. However, this did not come without difficulties. Many believe this decision was primarily driven by a desire to reassert Turkey’s role and importance in the post-Cold War era. The Gulf crisis erupted at a time when Turkish perceptions about the restructuring of the European security system were tinged with considerable pessimism and concern.<sup>58</sup> As such, Ankara’s policymakers were concerned that the end of the Soviet threat and East-West rivalries might diminish Turkey’s geostrategic significance within the Western alliance. However, there were also apprehensions among Turkish political and military elites that participation in the coalition might expose Turkey to risks from Iraq, a neighboring state.<sup>59</sup> Despite these fears, President Özal believed that Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait presented an opportunity to highlight Turkey’s strategic importance to the West and successfully positioned Turkey as a central player in the Allied coalition. The Gulf War significantly impacted Turkey with security and economic problems. This involvement included halting the flow of Iraqi oil exports through Turkish pipelines and allowing the US Air Force to use Turkish bases for strikes into northern Iraq.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, this forced Turkey to respond to several challenges by employing a more assertive posture than in the previous decades.

First, Turkey became the primary destination for refugees fleeing Northern Iraq as Iraqi forces moved to quell the Kurdish insurgency. In response, to protect civilians from Iraqi military attacks, the UN, led by the US, imposed no-fly zones over Iraq. Second, the embargoes on Iraq, which later became part of the US dual containment policy, also severely affected the Turkish economy. Consequently, Turkey felt compelled to engage more deeply in the Middle East to ensure its

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<sup>56</sup> Hinnebusch, R. A. (2003). *The international politics of the Middle East*. Manchester University Press ; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 212.

<sup>57</sup> Highlighted by the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993.

<sup>58</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 1996, 260. See also Sayari, S. 1992.

<sup>59</sup> This will be better examined in the following sections.

<sup>60</sup> Operation Provide Comfort II was the operation established in July 1991 by the rump of the anti-Iraq coalition to protect the Kurds of northern Iraq, and hence encourage them to stay in their homes. It grew out of the April 1991 humanitarian mission (Operation Provide Comfort), itself a response to the exodus of nearly 2m Kurds, 750,000 of whom had headed for the Turkish border after the anti-Saddam Hussein uprisings collapsed. Virtually from its inception, Provide Comfort was controversial in Turkey. Many Turks, including officials as well as politicians, suspected a hidden agenda aimed at encouraging Iraq’s Kurds to establish a separate state of their own. This, it was feared, would provide a model for independence which Turkey’s Kurdish population might pursue. Although Provide Comfort’s supporters claimed that it would benefit Turkey by reducing the likelihood of a further massive refugee outflow, the six-monthly renewal of its mandate became a routinely contentious matter. For a Turkish perspective, see Ramazan, G. (1995). Operation Provide Comfort: Origins and objectives. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 50(3), 1.

security.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, Baghdad's reduced control over areas bordering Turkey facilitated the emergence of a Kurdish entity in the region, and this power vacuum in Northern Iraq provided a conducive environment for the PKK to conduct terrorist operations in the Turkish territory. Against this backdrop, the end of the Gulf War set in motion a process of expansion of Turkey's role in the Middle East,<sup>62</sup> which saw intensified counter-insurgency efforts and adopted proactive policies in northern Iraq and towards Syria.<sup>63</sup> However, in 1998, this brought Turkey to the verge of war with Syria when the former decided to send a strong and decisive signal by threatening military action to force the expulsion of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, who had been residing in Damascus for years.<sup>64</sup> The confrontation with Syria, which resulted in Öcalan's expulsion,<sup>65</sup> marked a shift from the reactive foreign policy of the Cold War to a more proactive approach to issues critical to national security. A latent objective, however, was to demonstrate Turkey's power in the area where the two Iraqi Kurdish groups, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) under Masoud Barzani's leadership and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under Jalal Talabani's leadership, emerged as the dominant political forces. While Ankara officially denied the creation of a buffer zone in the area, even though some prominent politicians favored this idea,<sup>66</sup> further agitated the Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian governments.

It is also interesting to note the different reactions of the US and European states to Turkey's more assertive stance. For instance, the US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke announced that the operation did not violate international law, and he claimed.

It is in the self-defense of Turkey. The PKK is a terrorist organization operating across an international border, and we understand that! The only condition imposed by the USA was the guarantee from the Turkish government that the intervention was to be 'limited in scope and duration.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Sayarı, S. (2019). Turkey and the United States: Changing Dynamics of an Enduring Alliance. In T. Y. Ismael & M. Aydın (Eds.), *Turkey's foreign policy in the 21st century: A changing role in world politics* (pp. 27–39). Routledge.

<sup>62</sup> On Turkey's policies toward the Middle East in the post-Cold War era, see Barkey, H. J. (Ed.). (1996). *Reluctant neighbor: Turkey's role in the Middle East*. United States Institute of Peace Press; Robins, 1991; Sayarı, S. (1997). Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 26(3), 44–55.

<sup>63</sup> While earlier Turkey had mainly conducted counterinsurgency operations within its borders, since the early 1990s, Turkish troops have periodically entered northern Iraq to pursue PKK militants.

<sup>64</sup> Turkey resorted to coercive diplomacy and followed a policy of aggrandizement. Troops were transferred to the Syrian border, and at the beginning of November, military maneuvers that lasted one week at the Syrian border with the participation of 50,000 soldiers were organized (it was named Exercise Determination - *Kararlılık Tatbikatı*). Units from the land forces, navy, and air force took part in the exercise, and also the navy exercised a naval landing operation. According to General Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu, he was the Chief of the General Staff, who talked about the events after his retirement at the end of a conference on terrorism at the Military Academy in 2005; Turkey had developed a multi-stage plan to deal with Syria. Turkey informed Mubarak, President of Egypt, and other states in the region and convinced them about Syria's role in terrorism. Faruk, M. (2005, October 18). Kıvrıkoğlu: "Tanklarla Suriye'ye Girecektik." *Aksiyon*. <https://www.siyahgribeyaz.com/2005/10/kvrkolu-tanklarla-suriyeye-girecektik.html>.

<sup>65</sup> He travelled to countries such as Greece, Russia and Italy. Turkey applied diplomatic pressure on these countries and especially against Italy a boycott started in Turkey. At the end, thinking he was to fly to the Netherlands, he got on the airplane at Nairobi Airport and caught by a Turkish Special Forces team and he was brought to Turkey on 15 February 1999. After that, terrorist activities gradually decreased and ended in 2002. See Varouhakis, M. (2009). Greek intelligence and the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. *Studies in Intelligence*, 53(1).

<sup>66</sup> For example, Bulent Ecevit, the leader of the DSP.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Müftüler-Baç, 1996, 260.

Seemingly, the perception of the US government was that

This is an operation conducted by a legitimate, democratic government and a close ally of the West against a brutal terrorist organization. Turkey remains a necessary adjunct of Europe and a vital member of the Atlantic Alliance. It remains our friend in a troubled region and deserves our support.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time, severe reactions came from the European states, such that the European Parliament passed resolutions against Operation Steel. On 26 April 1995, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe decided that if Turkey did not withdraw from Northern Iraq in two months and if it did not restore democratic practices to its Kurdish population, Turkey's membership in the Parliamentary Assembly would be suspended.<sup>69</sup> Surprisingly, the Kurdish issue and the PKK also influenced Turkey's decision to establish a new security cooperation arrangement with Israel. The signing of a military training and education agreement in 1996 created a significant alignment between the region's two most potent military powers, affecting regional power balances. Although the agreement was not a formal alliance and both countries emphasized that it was not directed against third parties, one of Turkey's main motives was to signal to Syria the increased security risks of its adversarial policies, particularly its support for the PKK. Closer ties with Israel were also expected to enhance Turkey's military capabilities and technical expertise and provide an alternative source for weapons systems, as Turkey faced increasing difficulties in obtaining sophisticated weapons from the US due to opposition from anti-Turkish ethnic lobbies and human rights groups in Congress. Additionally, Turkish expectations of intelligence cooperation with Israel against the PKK and support from the Jewish lobby in Washington influenced Turkey's policy on Israeli-Turkish relations. By the decade's end, the military and security cooperation had significantly increased commercial and cultural ties between the two states.<sup>70</sup>

#### **4.1.2.3. The Balkans**

Without any doubt, Turkey significantly increased its interest and involvement in the Balkans post-Cold War era by deploying "a multilateral activism."<sup>71</sup> This was due to several regional developments. The fragmentation of Yugoslavia and the ensuing violent ethno-nationalist conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo seriously undermined regional stability, raising the possibility that a significant

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<sup>68</sup> Idem. The Wall Street Journal, Europe, 23 March 1995.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Müftüler-Baç, 1996, 260; See also Brown, 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Aykan, 1996.

<sup>71</sup> On Turkey's policies towards the Balkans in the 1990s, see Bechev, D. (2012). Turkey in the Balkans: Taking a broader view. *Insight Turkey*, 14(1), 131-146; Ekinci, D. (2009). The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992-1995): A Constructivist Approach. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 6(22), 37-60.

conflict could spill over into Turkey. Turkey embarked on an active diplomatic approach to prevent this escalation, which included participation in international peacekeeping operations. Additionally, the ethnic conflicts in the region generated extensive interest and concern in Turkey due to the presence of large numbers of Turks who had migrated from the Balkans to Turkey over the years.<sup>72</sup> Greek-Turkish rivalry and competition for regional political and economic influence also influenced Turkey's assertive role in Balkan affairs. Cooperation and understanding between the US and Turkey on regional security issues further facilitated greater Turkish activism in the Balkans through multilateral initiatives rather than unilateral actions.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the breakdown of regional order and stability, beginning with the Bosnian crisis and continuing with the Kosovo conflict, placed the Balkans on top of Turkey's security agenda. Initially, Ankara opposed the fragmentation of Yugoslavia and criticized EU policies that seemed to encourage this process. Turkish policymakers were concerned about the potential escalation of regional tensions and the implications of secessionism for Kurdish separatists and Turkey's territorial integrity.<sup>74</sup> However, as the Serbian ethnic cleansing policy against Bosnian Muslims intensified, Turkish public opinion galvanized, pushing the government to begin urging for a strong Western response. Here, Turkish multilateral activism became evident. While Ankara pushed for NATO military intervention and strong sanctions against the Milosevic regime in Belgrade, it also provided military aid to the Bosnian Muslims through covert channels. This multifaceted approach reached its peak in the aftermath of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 when welcoming the US-led effort to end the violence, Turkey participated in multilateral UN peacekeeping forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and became a vital partner of the US in training a new military force for the Bosnian Muslim-Croat Federation.<sup>75</sup>

Turkey's "multilateral assertiveness" continued with the Kosovo conflict in 1998, as that crisis was primarily viewed in terms of its impact on regional stability and order. Moreover, unlike its active diplomatic efforts on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims, Turkey did not seek to become the advocate of Kosovar Albanians in international organizations due to its unwillingness to support secessionist movements.<sup>76</sup> However, Turkey complied with NATO's decision to impose sanctions on Belgrade and deployed F-16 jets in Italy for NATO's air campaign. After the conflict ended, Turkey restored its humanitarian approach by contributing 1,000 troops to the UN peacekeeping forces in Kosovo.

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<sup>72</sup> See Kirişçi, K. (1995). Post Second World War Immigration from Balkan Countries to Turkey. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 12, 61–77. It should also be noted that individuals of Balkan origins played a major role in the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic in 1923. Their ranks included the country's founding father Atatürk. See Frey, F. W. (1965). *The Turkish Political Elite*. MİT Press.

<sup>73</sup> İlhan, U. (1998). Türk Dış Politikasında 'Sivilleşme' Ve Demokratikleşme Sorunları: Körfez Savaşı Örneği. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, 53(1), 409.

<sup>74</sup> Interview.

<sup>75</sup> Aybet, 2006.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with former Ambassador of a Balkan state in Turkey.

Throughout the 1990s, Turkey worked to develop closer political, economic, and military ties with several Balkan states. This included expanded bilateral relations with Albania, Macedonia, Romania, and Bulgaria, partly driven by competition with Greece.<sup>77</sup> As Turkey was the second country to recognize Macedonia as an independent country in 1992 and the first to open an embassy in Skopje a year later, Greece's opposition also helped solidify a Macedonian-Turkish military cooperation agreement. Following the downfall of their communist regimes, Albania and Bulgaria sought closer relations with Turkey and witnessed intense diplomatic activity between Ankara and Tirana, including visits by high-ranking officials and economic and military aid. However, economic ties remained limited compared to the growth of Italian and Greek business interests in Albania. Turkey's relations with Bulgaria transformed remarkably in the post-Cold War era. The end of repressive policies against Bulgaria's 1.5 million Turkish minority by the new democratic government in Sofia catalyzed cooperation and friendly relations. Turkey's trade with Bulgaria increased significantly despite Bulgaria's economic problems. High-level official visits, the signing of a Treaty of Friendship, and Turkey's support for Bulgaria's NATO membership improved relations between the two countries.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the Greek unrest, it can be said that the Özalist Balkan policy ended Turkey's isolated position in the Balkans. In a short time, even Greece understood that Turkey was not a new Ottoman Empire and its new Balkan policy was not based on a Muslim conspiracy against Greece but on cultural and economic cooperation. Second, different from the Cyprus and the Aegean issues, the developing ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, Turkey, and the West shared common interests. At the same time, preoccupied for its geographical vicinity Greece was a reluctant NATO ally in dealing with the Balkan conflicts. Turkey offered great help to the US and the European allies. Thus, the Balkan conflicts contributed to restoring Turkey-West relations as "The Bosnian crisis demonstrated the Özalist policies' difference: when the crisis erupted, Turkey, with the pressure from Islamic and ethnic circles, felt that it had to follow a more active foreign policy."<sup>79</sup>

#### **4.1.2.4.     *The European Union and the Cyprus Dilemma***

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<sup>77</sup> Greek academics and politicians referred Turkey's Balkan policy as "containment policy." For the Greeks Turkey was surrounding Greece by using Muslims and former Ottoman subjects. According to the Greek perception Turkey's efforts created a Muslim-Orthodox competition in the Balkans. See, Constantinides, S. (1996). Turkey, the emergence of a new foreign policy: A neo-ottoman imperial model. *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, 24(2), 323–334.

<sup>78</sup> Çaliş, Ş. (2001). Turkey's Balkan policy in the early 1990s. *Turkish studies*, 2(1), 135-146.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with former Ambassador of a Balkan state in Turkey.

Turkey's most important goal in the post-Cold War era was its integration with the European Community and the European Union (EU). Turkey's relative importance naturally diminished, especially compared the former communist states, which had the potential to form a wide buffer zone between Russia and Western Europe. However, the integration process remained Turkey's primary foreign policy goal for political and economic reasons. In the financial sense, Turkey has experienced harsh conditions since the mid-1980s. For political and security reasons, Turkey felt the need to be on the same side as Greece – as it did in NATO – that had been accepted into the EU in 1981.<sup>80</sup> Contradictions in the expectations of both sides finally converged in 1995 when Turkey was accepted into the Customs Union with the European Union, the first time for a non-member state. This decision, which would cause significant deficits in the country's trade balance in the following years, was considered a future entry ticket to the Union.<sup>81</sup> Although the EU had refused Turkey's application for full membership in 1987, at the 1999 Helsinki summit, Brussels accepted it as a candidate country to not derail Turkey from the Western axis.<sup>82</sup> This was also a consequence that, in the late 1980s, the end of the Cold War brought the EU as a new actor in the region, a development gradually disturbing the balance of power between Greece and Turkey in particular and the Eastern Mediterranean in general.<sup>83</sup> As such, several factors influenced Turkey's relationship with the EU. Notably, the EU lacked a clear policy on Turkey, compounding issues related to democracy and human rights. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) proclamation of 1983 further strained relations, with the EU deeming it illegal and contrary to UN resolutions.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, when Turkey applied for EU membership in 1987, the EU emphasized the Cyprus conflict and democratic issues as significant barriers.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, Turkey perceived the EU's acceptance of Cyprus's membership application in 1990 as an act of partisanship in the conflict, despite the EU's belief that a European perspective could facilitate a peaceful resolution.<sup>86</sup> The decision at the 1994 Corfu Summit to include Cyprus in the enlargement round exacerbated these tensions. Karaosmanoğlu highlights that Turkey, constrained by its strategic geography, pursued a dual-level strategy in Cyprus, maintaining that the conflict's resolution should be discussed solely within the UN framework and not linked to EU

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<sup>80</sup> Interview.

<sup>81</sup> In 1997, at the EU summit in Luxembourg, the union declared firmly that the Customs Union did not promise instant full membership for Turkey. The refusal in 1997 left Turkey disappointed in its full membership ambition.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with a former Turkish officer in the MFA section on EU relations.

<sup>83</sup> Kramer, H. (1997). The Cyprus problem and European security. *Survival*, 39(3), 16–32.

<sup>84</sup> For a full account on the EU-Cyprus issue for Turkey, see Ulusoy, K. (2016). The Cyprus Conflict: Turkey's Strategic Dilemma. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18(4), 393–406.

<sup>85</sup> Dağı, İ. D. (1996). Democratic transition in Turkey, 1980–83: The impact of European diplomacy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32(2), 124–141.

<sup>86</sup> European Commission. (1993, July). *Commission's Opinion on the Republic of Cyprus Application for Membership*. COM (93) 313. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/99cd34a4-e06a-4e6f-a957-b8f562034cdc>.



membership.<sup>87</sup> Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leadership viewed Cyprus's EU membership application as a violation of founding treaties, fearing it was part of Greece's strategy to isolate Turkey and undermine its strategic significance.<sup>88</sup>

The 1997 Luxembourg Summit was a critical moment, with the EU excluding Turkey from enlargement, citing problems with Greece and Cyprus as critical reasons. However, a faction within Turkey's elite saw EU membership as a potential solution to the political and economic crises of the 1990s. This led to deep divisions, ultimately resolved in favor of pro-democracy forces, resulting in gradual reforms and a more conciliatory foreign policy from the late 1990s onwards.<sup>89</sup> The Agenda 2000 declared that negotiations with Cyprus would proceed regardless of the ongoing conflict, a decision criticized by Turkey. In December 1999, the Helsinki Summit granted Turkey official candidate status, expecting concrete steps towards democratization, resolving border issues with Greece, and supporting UN efforts in Cyprus. Adamson highlighted that Turkey's democratization and EU accession created positive dynamics for the Cyprus issue, motivating the elite to pursue political reforms and adopt a moderate foreign policy stance.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, a significant development in foreign policy under Ecevit's government was the rapprochement with Greece, which began following the Turkish earthquake of August 1999 and the Greek earthquake one month later.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Athens withdrew its veto on Ankara's application to the EU, leading to the December 1999 EU summit in Helsinki. Turkey was formally invited to become a candidate for full membership. In January 2000, George Papandreou became the first Greek Foreign Minister to pay an official visit to Turkey in 38 years, and Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem reciprocated the following month. This thaw in relations culminated in joint military exercises on each other's territory for the first time in many years. This integration of domestic reform and foreign policy revision within a regional framework was influenced by the impact of the EU.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, a faction within Turkey's elite saw EU membership as a potential solution to the political and economic crises of the 1990s. "This led to deep divisions, ultimately resolved in favor of pro-democracy forces," resulting "in gradual reforms and a more conciliatory foreign policy from the late 1990s onwards."<sup>93</sup> Post-Helsinki, Turkey-EU rapprochement was evident in Cyprus as well. The EU endorsed UN efforts for a settlement,

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<sup>87</sup> Idem.

<sup>88</sup> Interview.

<sup>89</sup> Turkish Embassy in London. (2002). Why Cyprus entry into the European Union would be illegal: Proceedings of a panel discussion held at the Turkish Embassy in London, 8 November 2001. Turkish Embassy.

<sup>90</sup> Adamson, F. B. (2001). Democratization and the Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy: Turkey in the 1974 Cyprus Crisis. *Political Science Quarterly*, 116(2), 277–303.

<sup>91</sup> The televised images of suffering led to outpourings of sympathy and aid between the two nations. See Ker-Lindsay, J. (2000). Greek-Turkish rapprochement: *The impact of disaster diplomacy?* *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 14(1), 215–232.

<sup>92</sup> Diez, T. (Ed.). (2002). The European Union and the Cyprus conflict: Modern conflict, postmodern union. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

<sup>93</sup> Interview.

suggesting that Cyprus's membership could catalyze a solution. In October 2002, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed a plan for a united Cyprus as an EU member, drawing on the Belgian and Swiss federal systems for power-sharing.<sup>94</sup> Unlike previous UN negotiations, this plan was underpinned by the EU's enlargement timetable "as complex but designed to maximize the tight timetable for EU enlargement".<sup>95</sup> Concurrently, as will be seen later in a more contextualized setting, domestic political shifts significantly influenced Turkey's Cyprus policy. The coalition government led by Bülent Ecevit collapsed in August 2002 due to internal conflicts over the third reform package, which included abolishing the death penalty, recognizing property claims of non-Muslim foundations, and recognizing languages other than Turkish. These domestic changes, coupled with international pressures and the EU's decisions, injected momentum into efforts to resolve the Cyprus conflict, illustrating the interconnectedness of domestic and foreign policy dynamics in Turkey's quest for EU integration.

#### **4.1.3. A View from and of Washington**

As seen in the analysis of these different contexts, the events that occurred in Turkey's areas of interest after the end of the Cold War demonstrated how the regional and international levels became much more intermingled and how this intersection had a significant impact on Ankara's necessity to establish and prove its "new role" in these changing scenarios. In the Middle East, the Gulf crisis became a significant turning point for Turkey's relations with the West. It quickly became an issue involving the Middle East and Western relations with Turkey, and the policies developed in Ankara in one sphere could not help but significantly impact those in the other.<sup>96</sup> The Gulf crisis was important for analyzing the strength of Western security because it revealed how the European countries could be harmed by turmoil in the Middle East and the extent to which the Europeans were tied to stability in this region.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, in the Balkans, William Hale underlines the importance of Turkey as a country with a Muslim population in eliminating the rise of radical Islamism in the Balkans during the crisis. "In all these efforts, Turkey was concerned with preventing independent initiatives by radical Muslim states like Iran and persuading the Western powers that it would be

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<sup>94</sup> Tocci, N., & Kovziridze, T. (2004). Cyprus. JEMIE - Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe, 1, 1–41.

<sup>95</sup> See the conclusions in Hannay, D. (2014). *Cyprus: The Search for a Solution*. I.B. Tauris.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Robins, 1991, 68.

<sup>97</sup> See Müftüler-Baç, 1997.

better to have Turkey, as an officially democratic, secular, and pro-Western state, to head reactions by the Muslim world.”<sup>98</sup>

In this context, one should also read the external perception of the reconfiguration of TFP in this transitional period. Richard Holbrooke, the Deputy Secretary of State in charge of European Affairs, stated that Turkey became a “front-running country” in the post-Cold War era and that it was involved in most issues, political, military, economic, and energy-related, regarding NATO, the Balkans, Cyprus, the Aegean, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, some authors claimed that Turkey had much more geostrategic value than it used to have in the Cold War period.<sup>100</sup> In the same vein, Zbigniew Brzezinski described Turkey as a “geopolitical axis” that functioned to provide stability in the Black Sea region, controlling the passage to the Mediterranean, balancing Russia in the Caucasus, working as an antidote against Islamic radicalism and supporting NATO in the southern flank.<sup>101</sup> With a different view, a former American Ambassador to Ankara pointed out: “The threat of the past 400 years – Russia – has been virtually eliminated. Turkey is now more secure than it has been since its birth as a Republic after the First World War.”<sup>102</sup> These discrepancies demonstrate that although, at first glance, the end of the Cold War made Turkey’s geostrategic position less critical than its traditional allies,<sup>103</sup> the Gulf Crisis contributed to maintaining its importance to preserve the interests of the West.<sup>104</sup> This finds confirmation in the fact that while Özal’s proposal for a “strategic partnership” was initially refused by Washington just in March 1991, the ongoing turmoil in different regions led us to repropose it under the label “enhanced partnership” during Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel’s visit to Washington in February 1992. In this matter, the US stated that Turkey was a reliable partner and a model for new emerging states.<sup>105</sup> This “enhanced partnership” between the USA and Turkey continued and deepened during the 1990s, independent of the frequently changing Turkish coalition governments. Oran describes the relationship between the USA and Turkey in the post-Cold War era as one between a hegemon or a preeminent superpower and a regional power. He notes that the success of Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s mainly emanated from its cooperation with the US in different strategic areas.<sup>106</sup> However, in Ankara, there was also a preoccupation with

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<sup>98</sup> Hale, 2012, 62.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Çakır, 2014, 147.

<sup>100</sup> Larrabee, F. S., & Lesser, I. O. (with Center for Middle East Public Policy (Rand Corporation)). (2003). *Turkish foreign policy in an age of uncertainty*. Rand; Robins, P. (2003). *Suits and uniforms: Turkish foreign policy since the Cold War*. University of Washington Press.

<sup>101</sup> Idem.

<sup>102</sup> Morton Abramowitz, *Foreword*, in Fuller & Lesser, 2019, viii.

<sup>103</sup> For instance, Turkey’s role proposal to form a free trade zone with the USA was not regarded favorably by the American administration. In addition, the USA declared that it would close some military bases and decrease the number of its military staff in Turkey.

<sup>104</sup> Larrabee & Lesser, 2003; Uslu, 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Abramowitz, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Oran, 2002.

the risk of becoming a satellite of the hegemon power and Western Institutions.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, these main parameters oriented TFP decision-makers to “implement mainly short-term, rarely medium-term, strategic plans within the previously drawn frameworks by the superpowers instead of forming longer-term, independent policies.”<sup>108</sup> Overall, the end of the bipolar world created radical changes in the international system, resulting in difficulties in defining the international sphere and power relations. The uncertainty that emerged parallel to the new international system created opportunities for states seeking an advantage to thrive in the international hierarchy without any real possibility of totally disregarding the US policies in those areas.

#### **4.1.4. External Projection Parameters**

##### ***4.1.4.1. The Limits to be a Mediator***

In the 1990s, Turkey also tried to shape its role as a critical player in regional organizations and mediation efforts. However, significant developments were hindered by historical tensions, stereotypes, and the political and economic transitions in many states. In 1992, Turkey promoted the formation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) to endorse economic cooperation among Black Sea basin countries.<sup>109</sup> Ankara also mediated in northern Iraq between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). With support from the US and Britain, Turkey facilitated the Ankara Agreement in October 1996 to mitigate conflict and prevent alliances with the PKK.<sup>110</sup> Despite initial success, further diplomatic efforts were needed, culminating in the Washington Agreement in September 1998. In 2002, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit initiated mediation efforts on two other fronts. First, to avert the impending US invasion of Iraq, Ecevit’s administration urged Baghdad to comply with UN inspections, opposing the war due to its potential to destabilize the region and harm Turkey’s economy. Despite a visit to Washington to discuss mediation, the US administration dissuaded Ecevit from pursuing this role. The second mediation effort addressed the Palestinian question. Turkey aimed to leverage its improved relations with Israel, established through 1996 trade and defense agreements, to mediate during the Second

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 240-42

<sup>108</sup> Interview.

<sup>109</sup> Established with the Bosphorus Statement signed on June 25, 1992, included Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

<sup>110</sup> Gunter, M. M. (1997). The Foreign Policy of the Iraqi Kurds. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 20(3), 1–19.

Intifada. Despite Bülent Ecevit's advocacy for Turkish mediation, his government's limited tenure prevented significant progress. He proposed mediation again in 2002 but could not advance this initiative due to the impending general elections.

Turkey also established new bureaucratic and intergovernmental structures to meet the expectations of its new role. In 1992, the Summits of Presidents of Turkish-speaking Countries were convened for the first time, with headquarters in Istanbul, an academic center in Kazakhstan, and a Parliamentary Assembly in Baku. This initiative aimed to foster cooperation in political, economic, social, and cultural fields and evolved into the Turkic Council (TÜRKKON) in 2009, including Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan as member states. In 1993, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), known as the "UNICEF of the Turkic World," was established with member states including Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and eight observer states, primarily autonomous republics from the Russian Federation.<sup>111</sup> Before these developments, Turkey lacked an official body for humanitarian aid. Although the Turkish Red Crescent provided aid during natural disasters in 1985, Turkey allocated \$10 million in humanitarian aid to Sub-Saharan Africa. Recognizing the need for an administrative body, the Turkish Agency for Cooperation (TİKA) was established under the State Planning Agency in 1987. Although its initial budget was modest (\$128,000 in 1987, rising to \$689,000 by 1991), it paved the way for institutionalizing foreign development aid in Turkey.<sup>112</sup> In 1992, the Presidency for Economic, Cultural, Educational, and Technical Cooperation (EKETİB) was created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to effectively coordinate Turkey's foreign aid efforts.

These agencies began establishing coordination offices, prioritizing former Soviet Republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Offices were also set up in Moldova, where Orthodox Christian Turks (*Gagauzes*) reside, and later in Bosnia-Herzegovina following the war. Under the three-party coalition government in 1999, TİKA was placed under the Prime Minister's office. Prof. Dr. Abdülhaluk Mehmet Çay was appointed Minister Responsible for Coordination with Turkish Republics and Brethren Societies. Despite economic constraints and past controversies, such as the involvement of a TİKA official in a 1994 coup attempt in Azerbaijan, TİKA expanded its operations, establishing radio channels and new offices in Tajikistan, Mongolia, and Albania. Turkey supported the Turkic republics with telephone switchboard units and satellite systems to reduce their dependence on Russia, and Turkish Airlines (THY) began direct flights to their capitals. Süleyman Demirel promised \$1.1 billion in credit, and the Turkish Ministry of Education established schools

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<sup>111</sup> For a more detailed appraisal, see Bal, İ. (1998). The Turkish model and the Turkic republics. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 3(3).

<sup>112</sup> Haşimi, C. (2014). Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy and development cooperation. *Insight Turkey*, 16(1), 127-145.

and provided scholarships to 2,000 students from each country. By January 1999, 2,133 of 16,692 scholarship recipients had graduated, while many returned home or continued their studies elsewhere. However, Uzbekistan ceased sending students to Turkey in 1998.<sup>113</sup> Overall, as Berdal Aral notes, Turkey struggled to fulfill its leadership role in the region despite its ambitions due to various challenges. External factors, such as Russia's reassertion of influence in former Soviet territories and internal weaknesses within Turkey, hindered its ability to lead effectively.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, during this period, the governments could not dedicate sufficient energy to foreign policy due to domestic issues such as terrorism, human rights concerns, and economic problems.<sup>115</sup> The frequent changes in office, with some ministers serving for as little as four months, made foreign policy planning particularly challenging.

#### ***4.1.4.2. Risky Economic Performance***

During the late 1980s and early 2000s, Turkish governments recognized that their electoral success hinged on their ability to deliver economic benefits, such as higher incomes, increased employment, and improved social services. This necessitated effective domestic policies, but economic needs also heavily influenced foreign policy. To ensure continued economic growth, Turkish governments aimed to avoid political conflicts with key trading partners and avoid isolationist policies that could alienate international financial markets or potential investors. With the end of the Cold War, Turkish export markets expanded significantly, particularly in the former Soviet Union, which a state-controlled economy had previously restricted. Concurrently, Turkey leveraged its growing economic power to foster regional stability through increased economic links and dependencies. As mentioned, President Turgut Özal (1989-1993) was a strong proponent of this approach, believing economic interdependence would enhance political relations. In the early 1990s, the domestic economy witnessed a massive inflow of (primarily short-term) foreign capital. Furthermore, the so-called foreign exchange gap, which had constrained the growth potential of Turkey for more than three decades, was alleviated. The ready availability of foreign exchange enabled the Turkish Lira to appreciate against the significant currencies realistically and led to a rapid expansion of import demand. Moreover, it made possible the financing of both the rapidly growing

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<sup>113</sup> Aydın, M. (2005). Turkish Foreign Policy At The End Of The Cold War: Roots And Dynamics. *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 36, 1–36.

<sup>114</sup> Aral, 2001, 83.

<sup>115</sup> Idem.

fiscal deficit of the public sector and the sudden rise of wage costs in the labor market.<sup>116</sup> Despite economic growth in numbers, Turkey's economy suffered from poor management until 2001.<sup>117</sup> A massive public sector deficit led to an average annual inflation rate of around 75% between 1990 and 2000, and the Turkish Lira depreciated drastically from TL 2,609 to the US dollar in 1990 to TL 625,218 in 2000. External debt also rose from \$49.2 billion in 1990 to \$118.3 billion in 2000, with the external debt service ratio peaking at 35.4% in 1998.<sup>118</sup> This economic instability culminated in a crisis in February 2001, triggered by a public dispute between Prime Minister Ecevit and President Sezer. The resulting market panic caused a stock market crash, the collapse of two state banks, and a 50% devaluation of the currency within two months. GDP dropped between 5.7% and 7.5% in 2001. Worse was to come in February 2001, when Prime Minister Ecevit had an open and bitter argument with President Sezer, in which the President accused Ecevit of failing to investigate reports of widespread malpractice at three state banks and failing to sack his Minister of Energy, who was charged with corrupt practices.<sup>119</sup>

In response to the crisis, Kemal Derviş, a former World Bank Vice-President, was appointed Minister of the Economy. He implemented a stabilization plan under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with solid support from the US government.<sup>120</sup> In May 2001, Turkey received an \$8 billion credit line from the IMF, followed by an additional \$17 billion in emergency credits in February 2002. In exchange, Turkey committed to stringent fiscal targets, central bank independence, banking sector reform, and privatization of state enterprises.<sup>121</sup> Turkey's foreign trade patterns also evolved significantly during this period. In 1990, the European Community accounted for nearly 46% of Turkey's total trade, with other OECD countries, primarily the USA and Japan, comprising another 19%. The Middle East accounted for 13%, the USSR for 5%, and other countries for 17%. By 1998, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which replaced the USSR, increased its share to 12.7%, while the EU's share slightly rose to 49%.<sup>122</sup>

Overall, economic considerations increasingly influenced TFP from the mid-1980s onwards. However, the economy alone was not the sole determinant in foreign policy decisions. For instance, during the Gulf War in 1990, Turkey sided with the international community against Iraq's invasion

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<sup>116</sup> Haşim Köse, A., & Yeldan, A. E. (1998). Turkish Economy in the 1990s: An Assessment of Fiscal Policies, Labor Markets and Foreign Trade. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 18, 51–78.

<sup>117</sup> Hale, 2012, 152.

<sup>118</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit. (n.d.). *Country Report, Turkey*. See the sections for 4th Oct 1994, 2nd October 1999, January 2004.

<sup>119</sup> Hale, 2012, 152-53.

<sup>120</sup> Öniş, Z., & Rubin, B. (2004). *The Turkish Economy in Crisis*. Routledge, 17.

<sup>121</sup> For the details, see the government's Letter of Intent to the IMF of 3 April 2002, from the IMF website [www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2002/tur/02/index.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2002/tur/02/index.htm).

<sup>122</sup> Ertuğrul, A., & Selçuk, F. (2001). A Brief Account of the Turkish Economy, 1980-2000. *Russian & East European Finance and Trade*, 37(6), 6–30.

of Kuwait despite significant trade relations and economic interests with Iraq. The UN embargo on Iraq severely impacted Turkish exports and regional trade, with the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık pipeline remaining largely ineffective, resulting in estimated losses of around \$50 billion.<sup>123</sup> As Turkey's integration into the global economy deepened, financial considerations played a more significant role in foreign policy-making. Industrialists and business people increasingly influenced government decisions, with economic organizations and business associations gaining prominence in domestic politics.<sup>124</sup> However, from 1990 to 2002, security, defense, and political issues still outweighed economic factors in shaping TFP. A substantial case is the cost of the war against Kurdish terrorism, which necessitated the deployment of almost half of the total strength of the armed forces. In 1994-1995, when the campaign was at its height, it cost US\$ 7 billion annually.<sup>125</sup> Turkey had to increase its defense expenditures, while the general trend worldwide was to decrease it. In this sense, Turkey's ability to resist systemic pressures in favor of changing its foreign policies during this period was limited. Turkey could not alter the international system as a middle-sized power with relatively weak domestic authority. Consequently, from an economic and material capabilities viewpoint, changes in Turkish foreign policy in the first decade of the post-Cold War era were primarily driven by external factors.<sup>126</sup>

#### ***4.1.4.3. The Reforms of the Military Industry***

In light of the global and regional changes in this period, Turkey initiated a modernization and restructuring of its armed forces to address new threats. The Turkish Land Forces (TLF) disbanded most division commands, except for a few, and adopted a command system based on army corps, brigades, and battalions, enhancing command accuracy. Many infantry divisions were transformed into mechanized or armored brigades, enabling rapid deployment and independent operations.<sup>127</sup> In the Naval Forces, the National Ship Project (Milli Gemi Projesi-MİLGEM) was launched on February 15, 2000, to build corvettes capable of anti-submarine warfare and surface operations, emphasizing maximum involvement of the Turkish defense industry. The Ship Integrated Combat Administration System Project (GENESIS) was also completed using national resources.<sup>128</sup> The Turkish Air Force

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<sup>123</sup> Idem.

<sup>124</sup> This will be tackled in the next section.

<sup>125</sup> Hale, 2012), 203.

<sup>126</sup> Elekdag, 1996.

<sup>127</sup> TLF. (2014). Turkish Land Forces. Retrieved from History of Turkish Land Forces: <http://www.kkk.tsk.tr/EN/>.

<sup>128</sup> TNF. (2014). Türk Deniz Kuvvetleri Tarihçesi. Retrieved from TNF: [http://www.dzkk.tsk.tr/denizweb/turkce/hakkimizda/genel\\_tarihce.php](http://www.dzkk.tsk.tr/denizweb/turkce/hakkimizda/genel_tarihce.php)



(TAIF) participated in Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia in 1995, highlighting the need for tanker aircraft for mid-flight refueling due to airspace restrictions by Bulgaria and Greece, which limited operational time. Consequently, two KC-135R aircraft were rented from the USA, serving until 1998, and seven modernized KC-135R aircraft entered service in 1997.<sup>129</sup> However, Turkey faced obstacles from the US Congress regarding arms sales due to perplexities on Turkey's domestic stability, increased geopolitical activism, and lobbying activities, leading to a limited sale of AH-1 Cobra helicopters.<sup>130</sup> During this period, Turkey signed military training agreements with various countries, training 27,277 personnel from 52 countries at Turkish military academies and war colleges. Mobile training teams were also dispatched to several countries. The NATO-affiliated Partnership for Peace Training Center was established in Ankara in 1998, training 13,935 military personnel from 91 countries.<sup>131</sup>

All these changes came into force with the approval of "The Turkish Defense Industry Policy and Strategy," which set out the principles for short-, intermediate- and long-term planning for the "development of the defense industry and the production of the weapons, tools, and ammunition needed by the TSK from Turkish national resources and using indigenous capabilities to the maximum possible extent."<sup>132</sup> As such, a relatively more precise road map was drawn for the defense industry in this period. Themes such as emphasizing exports and international competition, adaptation to new technologies, making the most of existing opportunities, and producing for civilian purposes began to be stressed more strongly. Law No. 3238 and the Policy Document enabled, especially between 1990 and 2000, the procurement approach to be changed from ready purchase to joint production.<sup>133</sup> In this timeframe, projects such as the Armored Combat Vehicle, Small Cargo Aircraft, Beginner Trainer Aircraft, and Cougar Helicopter came to the fore. It is essential to mention that the most critical procurement at the time was the purchase of six GNAT-type drones from American General Atomics in 1995, which prompted Turkey to initiate domestic development with the Turkish Aerospace Industry (TAI), producing a series of unarmed UAV prototypes.<sup>134</sup> Obviously, the steps taken during these periods are necessary and valuable, as demonstrated by a trend that continued in 1998–1999, which indicates that Turkey's defense expenditures rose from \$5 billion in 1998 to \$12

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<sup>129</sup> Defence Turkey. (2021, July 5). *HvKK, KC-135R Tanker Uçaklarını Modernize Ediyor!* <https://www.defenceturkey.com/tr/icerik/hvkk-kc-135r-tanker-ucaklarini-modernize-ediyor-4627>.

<sup>130</sup> Erhan, C. (2002). ABD ve NATO ile İlişkiler. In B. Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1980)*. İletişim Yayınları, 288.

<sup>131</sup> Turkish military experts provided training to African countries, including Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Algeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Chad, Zimbabwe, and Morocco, and officers from Bosnia, Macedonia, and Georgia received training in Turkey. See Aksiyon: <http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/aksiyon/haber-10259-26-turk-askeri-dunyayaaciliyor.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Türkiye'nin Milli Savunma Politikası. (2000). *White book: Turkey 2000*. Monch Media, 30. See also Menut, E., & Demirdüzen, S. (2021). *Promises and Perils: Exploring the Turkish Defense Industry*. 26(2).

<sup>133</sup> Demir, 2020, 27.

<sup>134</sup> Soyaltin-Colella & Demiryol, 2023, 731.

billion in 1999.”<sup>135</sup> In terms of organization, transforming the army meant accelerating the transition from a force structure based on unwieldy 12,000-man divisions to a more mobile one based on 6,000-man brigades. Regarding armaments, it centered on a plan to co-produce as many as 3000 main battle tanks equipped with advanced armor protection and antitank weaponry. To support such an enhanced land force, it was also decided to augment the Army’s small fleet of attack helicopters – which grew from zero to 38 between 1990 and 1995 – with an additional 145 helicopters. This was to be realized through another co-production deal that, at an envisaged cost of \$4 billion, would constitute the second most significant component of the overall military build-up after the main battle tank project.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the critical steps taken, however, the change made in the workflow of projects and the private companies or official institutional structures that were gradually established, the framework promised by documents and laws remained only requests, desired targets, and mechanism recommendations, particularly until the mid-2000s. The achievement of an overall, substantial, and comprehensive structural transformation failed due to factors such as limited economic capabilities and scarce international recognition as a growing middle power. Moreover, as highlighted by Rossiter and Canon, autarky in armament production is supposed to free states from reliance on, and potential coercion from, supplier states and ensure they are not excluded from fast-evolving military technologies. A similar broadening of horizons took hold of the Turkish Navy. Here, attention focused on upgrading the small and primarily out-of-date fleet of frigates and submarines. A document released by the Naval Forces Command in November 1997 – bearing the evocative and highly unconventional title “Toward the Open Seas” (*Açık Denizlere Doğru*) – described the envisioned transformation from a force suitable only for coastal warfare into a true blue-water navy capable of achieving “sea control” far beyond Turkey’s coastlines. It argued that the Navy must henceforth maintain a “decisive presence in the Aegean above all, and also in the Black Sea and the entire Mediterranean to secure Turkey’s vital interests.” Even further afield, “the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean waters around Gibraltar have entered the Turkish Naval Forces’ sphere of interest” as well, so the Navy must be prepared to “participate actively” in developments that may occur there.” To perform such missions, the report concluded, an expanded force centering on 24 frigates (up from 10 in 1990) and 18 submarines (up from 15 in 1990, most of the 1940s and 1950s vintage) – all with advanced weapons and electronics systems – along with an array of support ships, amphibious landing vessels, and even a light aircraft carrier would be

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<sup>135</sup> Menut & Demirdüzen, 2021, 232.

<sup>136</sup> Mufti, 2009, 90.

needed.<sup>137</sup> However, resurgent Turkish attempts to achieve greater autarky in arms were not driven by military necessity alone; Turkey's pride and self-perception as a rising power were also factors. Historically, one of the hallmarks of great powers is their ability to provide for their own defense needs. Yet, as Turkey had learned, autarky in arms is an economically inefficient way to acquire weapons.<sup>138</sup> This would represent a main element in prompting the following Turkish governments in pursuing a more independent path in terms of national industrial-military complexes.

## 4.2. The Internal Level

The previous section has highlighted how the end of the Cold War and the eruption of regional and local conflicts in the surrounding regions of Turkey brought new challenges and threats as well as some opportunities for the country to reshape its role in different scenarios and portray itself as a rising middle power. Regardless of political affiliations, the dominant discourse of the 1990s was the idea of a "Turkish model" for other states, especially for those in the Middle East and newly independent states of Central Asia. The belief was that, with its democratic (far from perfect) secular regime and liberal economic structure, Turkey would be an example for other countries in transitioning to a form of democracy and open market that would respect Islamic and traditional cultural values. The Turkish politicians supported the Turkish model discourse because this would prevent the diminishing strategic importance of Turkey in the new era. In a sense, this discourse was also supported by Turkey's allies, especially the Turkish Republics in Central Asia, against the possibility that Iran would emerge as a model in which religion and anti-Western tendencies dominated political life.<sup>139</sup> Seemingly, Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser stated that "in a new geopolitical environment stretching from the Balkans to Western China, Turkey was now at the center of world politics."<sup>140</sup> In sum, whether Turkish governments could exploit the new opportunities presented by

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<sup>137</sup> Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı. (1997). *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Deniz Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı*. B.I/1450, 17, 18, 26.

<sup>138</sup> Bağcı, H., & Kurç, Ç. (2017). Turkey's strategic choice: buy or make weapons?. *Defence Studies*, 17(1), 38-62; Rossiter, & Cannon, 2022.

<sup>139</sup> Alterman, J. B., Brannen, S., Hamre, J. J., Barnett, C. L., Kuchins, A., Mankoff, J., & Cipoletti, T. J. (with Center for Strategic Studies). (2013). *The Turkey, Russia, Iran nexus: Evolving power dynamics in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>140</sup> Fuller & Lesser, 2019. Worth mentioning that Fuller served 20 years as an operations officer in the CIA. Assignments include postings in Turkey. On December 1, 2017, the Istanbul chief public prosecutor's office issued an arrest warrant for Fuller based on his alleged involvement in the planning of the failed 2016 Turkish coup d'état attempt. From 1994 to 1995, Lesser was a member of the secretary's policy planning staff at the US Department of State, responsible for Türkiye, Southern Europe, North Africa, and the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process.

the end of the Cold War and how they would do so also depended on whether they could rely on a stable domestic power base.<sup>141</sup> However, according to Hale

During the 1990s, this was the Achilles' heel of Turkish foreign policy since external problems were seriously exacerbated by internal weaknesses and "conflicts. "In the search for effective democratic government, the record of the 1990s was generally dismal. No single party won an overall majority in Parliament in any of the three general elections – held in 1991, 1995, and 1999 – and Turkey slipped back into the position of chronic governmental instability that it had experienced during the 1970s, although the story of the slide into the near-anarchy and eventual military takeover of 1978–80 was fortunately not repeated.<sup>142</sup>

Indeed, this situation opened the way for a long series of weak coalition governments and a lack of political leadership, undermining Turkey's capacity for a coherent foreign policy based on a long-term vision.<sup>143</sup> These governments could not devote sufficient energy to foreign policy due to domestic problems such as terrorism, human rights, and the economy.<sup>144</sup> In Turkey, political life witnessed turbulent times as eleven different governments, seven of them coalitions, were formed by seven Prime Ministers between 1990 and 2002, and fourteen Ministers of Foreign Affairs were posted. To analyze the impact of internal politics on foreign policy decisions, the governments of the period will be examined not only along with significant domestic and foreign policy events of the timeframe from 1990 to 2002 but also by including and comparing the different role conceptions and visions for TFP elaborated by different leaderships after the Cold War.

#### **4.2.1. The Özal-Demirel Condominium: Internal Disputes and Different Visions**

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<sup>141</sup> Hale, 2012, 138.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>143</sup> Baskın Oran identifies this as a problem for the conduct of foreign policy. By using statistical data he observed that in the period between April 1920 and February 1990, 28 different persons served as the MFA. The average term in office was 29.9 months. However, in the period from February 1990 to June 1997 (87 months), 11 different persons served at the same post for an average duration of 7.9 months. In addition, generally, individuals unfamiliar with foreign policy issues were appointed to this post (appointment to certain important posts such as the MFA, Ministry of Interior Affairs, and Ministry of Defense has always been a matter of bargaining process in the coalition governments). In this period, three persons served as President: Özal (09 November 1989-17 April 1993), Demirel (16 May 1993-16 May 2000), Ahmet Sezer (16 May 2000-27 August 2007). Mesut Yılmaz, Erdal İnönü, Tansu Çiller, Bülent Ecevit, and Devlet Bahçeli were the important politicians that marked this era. Regarding the MFA, Hikmet Çetin (20 November 1991-27 July 1994) and Ismail Cem (30 June 1997-11 July 2002) are the leading figures. Ismail Cem is also the longest-serving Minister in that post in this decade. The short-lived governments with Ministers serving sometimes for four months made foreign policy planning harder." See Oran 2002.

<sup>144</sup> Idem.

Between 1987 and 1991, Turgut Özal's solid hold on domestic political support was severely eroded by his government's economic failures and clashes with the rest of the establishment.<sup>145</sup> However, his grip on the bureaucracy was still firm enough for him to succeed Kenan Evren as President in November 1989. Although this would have constitutionally obliged him to cut all official ties with the ANAP, he continued to control both the party and the government from behind the scenes. In this situation, his Prime Minister, Yıldırım Akbulut, failed to impress either the party or the public as an effective leader, so former Foreign Minister Mesut Yılmaz successfully challenged him and now took over as party chairman and Prime Minister in June 1991.<sup>146</sup> Unwisely, Yılmaz decided to call an early general election in October 1991, in which the ANAP came in a poor second place, well behind Süleyman Demirel's DYP (DYP). This marked the rise of the first coalition government since Turkey's return to democracy in 1983, following the coup d'état of 1980, and it was formed on 20 November 1991 by the center-right DYP and the center-left SHP of Süleyman Demirel. Although there was relatively little difference in policies between the ANAP and DYP, the fierce rivalry between Demirel and Özal prevented any collaboration between the two. This intricate situation had essential repercussions on TFP because, as Özal tried to keep his position as the preeminent actor of foreign policy-making, tensions escalated between the President, the cabinet, and opponents in his own party.<sup>147</sup>

It can be argued that President Özal and Prime Minister Demirel favored an active foreign policy compared to the traditional approach. The problem, however, was the extent to which they were keen on the change. President Özal, compared with Demirel, had always been more far-reaching about an active foreign policy. On the other hand, Prime Minister Demirel was relatively more static and responsible despite his inclination to alter Turkish foreign policy. The discussion about TFP and the difference in the leaders' ideas in foreign policy-making reverberated with the new foreign policy events of the period. In contrast, it can be stated that the two parties tried to work primarily in tune with each other despite the ideological differences of their leaders.<sup>148</sup> Drawing on Robins's arguments regarding the nature of coalition politics in Turkey, "their typical characteristics are ideological and factionist attitudes along with clashes among personalities and disruptions created by these problems."<sup>149</sup> Therefore, it is essential to provide an overview of "Özalism," considered the central vision shaping TFP at the time. This does not mean discarding the agency of other political figures

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<sup>145</sup> Particularly its breakdown to control inflation which ran at an average annual level of 66% between 1988 and 1991. Hale, 2012, 139.

<sup>146</sup> Idem.

<sup>147</sup> Mazlum, S. C., & Doğan, E. (Eds.). (2006). *Sivil toplum ve dış politika: Yeni sorunlar, yeni aktörler* (1. basım). Bağlam.

<sup>148</sup> Ozkececi-Taner, 2005.

<sup>149</sup> Robins, 2006.

on the internal level but recognizing that while their visions and actions were more shaped and modified according to their perceptions of external and internal conditions<sup>150</sup>, Özal's vision played a much more encompassing role in terms of institutional power, ideological elements, and societal impact that were linked to Turkey's historical background.

#### 4.2.1.1. *Özalism and Neo-Ottomanism*

One concept and debate that cannot be overlooked when discussing Özal's understanding of TFP is the one about neo-Ottomanism. Although the origins of Ottomanism can be traced back to the late reformist period of the Ottoman Empire, for the aim of this thesis, we can limit our analysis to how Turkish sociopolitical forces and actors understood and reshaped those concepts during the Özal era. Indeed, in the 1991 ANAP political manifesto, it was highlighted that Turkey was not only a European country but also a country of the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Balkans, and Middle East. Because of Turkey's position, an active and multidimensional foreign policy was foreseen.<sup>151</sup> According to Özal,

the post-Cold War era represented “the most incredible opportunity presented to our nation in 400 years [...] If we fail to pass through the ‘gates of desire’ [*hâcet kapıları*] that have opened in front of us today ... we may never receive such an opportunity again.”<sup>152</sup>

The ““opportunity” consisted of the liberation for the first time since World War I of a “broad arc” of territory that had once belonged to the Ottoman Empire – a development which, on the one hand, reminded Turkey's citizens that they had once shared a “cultural and political identity that transcended ethnic differences,” and on the other hand “awakened in them a realization of their connection with their brethren abroad:

All the Turks, Kurds, Albanians, Bosnians, whoever it may be who were once Ottoman citizens and remained in those lands after we left are kinfolk of our own citizens today. They are the people beyond our borders who concern us in the first degree.”<sup>153</sup>

While recognizing Islam as the “cement” that united the Empire's “diverse ethnic groups,” Özal evoked an identity rooted in a shared historical – rather than a purely religious, let alone ethnic –

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<sup>150</sup> Indeed, these elements will be addressed in the “individual level” analysis later.

<sup>151</sup> Başbakanlık & Mevzuatı Geliştirme ve Yayın Genel Müdürlüğünce Yayınlanır. (1991, July 6). *T.C. Resmi Gazete*. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/20921.pdf>, 5-7.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 74.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 13.

consciousness: “If we look at the issue in this way, neither the Kurds of Iran nor the Turks of the new [Central Asian] republics are as close to us as the Turks and Kurds who had been Ottoman citizens.”<sup>154</sup>

In this sense, Özal’s solution to the structural impasses of the Turkish Republic was to foster a new national identity that could integrate various ethnic groups within a common Islamic heritage domestically while also justifying Turkey’s exertion of power and influence internationally. Accordingly, his enthusiasm for intervening in northern Iraq in 1990 and 1991 could be seen as the aim to solve historical issues – like the Kurdish question – by looking at the unifying character of the former Ottoman regions to hasten the transition to a new national identity.<sup>155</sup> In this regard, there is broad consensus in considering that what became popular as neo-Ottomanism was cultivated during Özal’s Presidency.<sup>156</sup> For him, a conservative *Nakşibendi*, Ottomanism was a crucial part of his political and social vision for the identity of Turkey and its orientation,<sup>157</sup> and the Ottoman legacy profoundly shaped his understanding of Islam.<sup>158</sup> As a conservative, pious Muslim with a neo-liberal economic outlook, Özal was deeply shaken by the Serbian forces’ genocidal campaign against the Bosnian Muslims. More broadly, according to Yavuz, the main catalysts behind neo-Ottomanism’s emerging discourse in the 1990s were domestic societal transformations that created alternative discursive spaces for critical thinking within the emergence of a new political, societal, and economic milieu and several significant international developments, such as the gradual collapse of the bipolar system, the Cyprus crisis, the EU’s refusal to accept Turkey as a full member, European indifference to the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and Kurdish ethnonationalism in southeastern Turkey.<sup>159</sup> This paralleled with the fact that a convergence of the state-sponsored Turkish-Islamic Synthesis after the 1980 coup, the rise of a pro-Islamist bourgeoisie, and the expansion of media and religious education have led to the formation of a new elite characterized by its economic liberalism and socio-political conservatism. These overlapping dynamics gradually forced the state to reform its overt hostility toward Islam and reconcile with the Ottoman past. As mentioned earlier, some Republican elites slowly started to view Islam either as a valuable tool against leftist subversion or as an instrument for social cohesion. Political parties seeking votes in the more relaxed political atmosphere of the post-Cold War period, urban Sufi orders, and nominally Muslim intellectuals who articulated and transmitted new interpretations of Islamic identity helped to change the states’ understanding of the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 12, 17, 20.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>156</sup> Laçiner, 2003; Yavuz, 1998.

<sup>157</sup> Çalıř, ř. H. (2015). Hayaletbilimi ve hayali kimlikler: Neo-Osmanlılık, Özal ve Balkanlar (5. baskı). Çizgi Kitabevi Yayınları.

<sup>158</sup> Özdemir, H. (2014). *Turgut Özal: Biyografi* (1. baskı). Doğan Kitap.

<sup>159</sup> Yavuz, 1998.

role of religion in society.<sup>160</sup> It is within this context that Özal openly challenged the state-centric Turkish identity and set the parameters of the new identity, arguing that:

Just as it was during the Ottoman Empire, it is possible today to transcend ethnic differences through Islamic identity. I believe that the most potent single constituting element of identity in this society is Islam. It is a religion that blends Muslims of Anatolia and the Balkans. Therefore, Islam is a powerful cement of co-existence and cooperation among diverse Muslim groups- Being a Turk in the ex-Ottoman space means being a Muslim or vice versa. The Western frontiers of this imagined cultural and economic space, for the neo-Ottomanists, begin in the hills of Velika Kladusa (North-West Bosnia) and Bar (Montenegro) and extend to Durres (Albania).<sup>161</sup>

In this sense, neo-Ottomanism emerged as “a world-view constructed based on a selective reading of Ottoman administrative practices as pluralistic [that] seeks to highlight those aspects that could be viewed by a modern observer as complementing a pluralist and pragmatic approach to issues of religious, cultural, and ethnic identity.”<sup>162</sup> Therefore, while Ottomanism was much more reminiscent of the lost memory and the willingness to restore the fallen Empire, Özal’s neo-Ottomanist formula had much more pragmatic logic. David Barchard, who coined the term, saw this concept as “one of several options for Turkey’s possible future orientation,” one that “offers the aptest definition of the term as consciousness of the imperial Ottoman past, which is a more potent force in Turkey than Islam because as Turkey regains economic strength, it will be increasingly tempted to assert itself.”<sup>163</sup>

This perception of a new “imagined” Turkey was articulated by Aydın Menderes, a prominent politician, who argued that “the borders of the Turkish Republic do not correspond to the political, economic, and historical realities of Turkey. We do not mean to change the borders by force, but we cannot ignore old and new ties and connections.”<sup>164</sup> In this regard, these definitions seem to explain

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<sup>160</sup> In particular, popular Sufi orders – Nakşibendi, Suleymanci, and Kadiri – and Nurcu groups have supported center-right political parties and sought to mold the state in terms of their own world view. Islamist intellectuals (such as Ismet Özel, Ali Bulac, Rasim Ozdenoren, and Ersin Giirdogan), journalists (including Fehmi Koru, Ahmet Tasgetiren, and Abdurrahman Dilipak), and groups (such as the Iskenderpaşa and Atinaluk Nakşibendi orders and the Nurcu associations) have successfully shaped public opinion by raising critical questions about state, society, identity, and history. They are viewed as pioneers of a new politicized Islamic identity, filtering international events through an Islamic lens and thus politicizing a Muslim understanding of political identity. In their perspective, the “national interest” and foreign policy orientation of the Turkish nation-state should be “Islamic.” Turkish Islamist intellectuals engage in a dual interpretation: they perceive international events through their Islamically shaped cultural frames and reinterpret Islamic messages and symbols in relation to contemporary social, economic, and political contexts. Notably, the Islamist discourse has been cautiously adopted by the state elite, who have begun using the language of Islamists to critique certain European attitudes towards Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Cyprus, and Turkey. See Lapidot, A. (2013). Islamic activism in Turkey since the 1980 military takeover. In E. Inbar & B. Maddy-Weitzman (Eds.), *Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East*. Routledge.

<sup>161</sup> Özal, “Türkiye’nin Önünde Hacet Kapıları Açılmıştır”, quoted in TBMM. (1991, 1995). *Türk Parlamento Tarihi* (D. Burhanettin, Ed.). <https://cdn.tbmm.gov.tr/TbmmWeb/Yayinlar/Dosya/218480c3-21b6-46d0-b21f-01866e93bdc9.pdf>, 150.

<sup>162</sup> Yavuz, 1998, 7. It is important to remark that Neo-Ottomanism can also be seen as lying behind this new definition of national interest and direction in Turkish foreign policy, which has two faces. One face looks back to an invented Ottoman-Islamic past as a Turk-made epoch. The other looks forward to a vision of a regionally dominant industrialized, but not necessarily civic and democratic, Turkey. By identifying the reimagined Ottoman imperial project and culture as Turkish, neo-Ottomanists seek to ethnicize the Ottoman state as the “glorious” achievement of the Muslim Turks.

<sup>163</sup> Barchard, D. (1985). *Turkey and the West*. Routledge, 17. Although Karpas claims that the Greeks first used the term during the 1974 Cyprus War, he is criticized for not substantiating his claim with evidence. See Karpas, 2004.

<sup>164</sup> Nokta, 16 May 1993, 33.



well the functionalist character that Özal attached to the concept to open a debate over Turkish identity and its implications on foreign policy:

When we look at this geopolitical space from the Adriatic Sea to Central Asia under the leadership of Turkey, we realize that this space is molded and dominated by Ottoman-Muslim and Turkic populations...The Ottoman-Muslim population shares the same historical legacy and fate as the Turks of Anatolia, and they still regard themselves as “Turks” in the religio-cultural sense. These groups live in Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Western Trace.<sup>165</sup>

During the era of Özal’s rule, his foreign policy reflected his domestic politics: both traditional and modern, western and Islamic, adeptly keeping one foot in the ex-Ottoman territories and the other in Europe. This was what Özal understood as neo-Ottomanism: being at home in Europe and Asia, having an imperial vision without being imperialist. This type of Ottomanism was pluralist in that it recognized the role and power of each community.<sup>166</sup> Nonetheless, this did not prevent the left and Kemalist groups in Turkey from accusing neo-Ottomanism of being aggressive,<sup>167</sup>. At the same time, some European and Greek academics called it an irredentist movement,<sup>168</sup> and some in the Western press saw the Özalist policies as pan-Ottomanist, pan-Turkist, and even pan-Islamist march of the Turks.<sup>169</sup> Despite its name, neo-Ottomanism did not necessarily represent an aggressive foreign policy aimed only at the former Ottoman territories. It was undoubtedly a way to look at the imperial Ottoman past, but also a product of a very different economic and social structure and a reaction to a Kemalist isolationist foreign policy without representing an irredentist, expansionist, or aggressive foreign policy.<sup>170</sup> The objective was to corroborate a new idea for the role of Turkey in a changing international scenario that aimed to build on a particular organic geopolitical, cultural, and economic relationship that had been absent during the Cold War and the early Republican years. In the words of Fuller, it suggested “that the Turks may now come to see themselves once again at the center of a world re-emerging around them rather than at the tail-end of a European world that is increasingly uncertain about whether or not sees Turkey as part of itself.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Özal, 1992, 14.

<sup>166</sup> Yavuz, 2016, 456.

<sup>167</sup> For a discussion, see Yağlı, E. (2024). Using the “proper one”: Language ideology in the context of Kemalism and neo-Ottomanism. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 1–19. Cambridge Core.

<sup>168</sup> Stavrou views Ottomanist orientation as an abandonment of the Kemalist philosophical basis of foreign policy, arguing that Turkish Balkan policy was based on common religion instead of secular considerations. Stavrou, N. A. (1993). The Dismantling of the Balkan Security System: Consequences for Greece, Europe and NATO. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 6(1), 45-46; Also, for “Ottomanist irredentism,” see Constantinides, 1996.

<sup>169</sup> See, among many, Zaman, A. (1992, November 29). Ottoman Heirs Seek New Balkan Role. *Sunday Telegraph*; Sneider, D. (1992, May 21). Turkey and Iran Play Out New “Great Game” in Asia. *The Christian Science Monitor*.

<sup>170</sup> Aykaç, P. (2022). Multiple neo-Ottomanisms in the construction of Turkey’s (trans)national heritage: TİKA and a dialectic between foreign and domestic policy. *Turkish Studies*, 23(3), 354–382; Abrami, S. C. A. (2024). Nostalgia for the Past in the “New Turkey”. Kemalism and Islamism at the Brink of a Utopian-Dystopian Divide. In *Utopian Visions, Dystopic Realities Multidisciplinary Reflections on Contemporary Challenges* (pp. 93–122). EDUCatt.

<sup>171</sup> Fuller & Lesser, 2019, 48.

To sum up, what is undeniable is that, unlike the Kemalist and leftist foreign policy approaches, Özalism added new dimensions to TFP, like in cultural and economic areas. National interest, independence, and many more foreign policy concepts were re-defined. Although all these caused a multidimensional and more internationalist foreign policy understanding, Özal did not see Islam, Turkism, and Ottomanism as an obstacle to Turkey's integration into the West but as an essential contribution to that ultimate target. In brief, Özalist foreign policy was an apparent deviation from Kemalism, without being an absolute rejection of the Atatürk's ideas. It did not represent "a wholesale rejection of Atatürk, but rather a recognition that not every idea and value of Atatürk has to be forever valid in Turkish consideration of the future."<sup>172</sup> Neo-Ottomanism, as understood by Özal, sought not to replace the Kemalist project of secular nation-building but to modify and update it by branding the variety (diversity?) of Ottoman identities as a feature of pluralism.. This understanding differs from the "hard-core Kemalist-Jacobin understanding of the nation-building project, but it also does not reject Turkey's Western orientation in foreign and domestic politics and its pragmatic approach to governance."<sup>173</sup> Neo-Ottomanism represented a new mindset that sought to resituate Turkish nation-building in its Ottoman roots by recognizing the Empire's legacy and its communities as the constitutive elements of the nation that live on in the Republic of Turkey. As it will be seen in the following sections, although with changes in terms of concepts and discourses, the Turkish elites in the post-Özal period did not refrain from constructing similar new images, ideas, and narratives to justify political choices stemming from the interconnected domestic and external dynamics of their times.

#### 4.2.1.2. *Caution vs Adventurism: the Gulf and in Nagorno-Karabakh*

The Gulf Crisis of 1990-1991 is crucial for understanding how Özal's ideological and pragmatic considerations shaped a significant turning point and how this caused intra-elite cleavages about a more proactive and ambitious stance. Viewing the crisis as a strategic opportunity, Özal aimed to reaffirm Turkey's value within the Western alliance, particularly to the United States, sending Turkish troops alongside coalition forces. In his words, the Gulf War could be "the most profitable deal of my life. We are betting one getting three."<sup>174</sup> This approach, however, faced formidable resistance from various domestic actors, including his own party members, opposition parties in

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>173</sup> Yavuz, 2016, 444. For more on the secularization of Turkey, see Berkes, N. (2013). *The development of secularism in Turkey*. Routledge.

<sup>174</sup> Hürriyet, 16-17 January 1991. See also this video interview, BBC Türkçe (Producer). (1991). *Yıl 1991: 1. Körfez Savaşı ve Türkiye* [Video recording]. <https://youtu.be/6P-VIRQBp2o?si=tO30A2Ghme-qM-T3>.

Parliament, the media, and the military,<sup>175</sup> which accused him of adventurism and jeopardizing national security. According to the latter, Özal's errors stood in underestimating the costs and overestimating the benefits to Turkey of an intervention against Iraq. General Kemal Yavuz, who during the crisis commanded the Second Army – the force that would be used in any cross-border operation spelled out the errors he and his colleagues discerned in Özal's calculus:

We opposed Özal's position in its entirety. ... The most important reason was that his policy was inimical to our national interests, derived from the ideas of another country [the United States], and was an adventurist approach...[...] "I asked him: 'Do you really think the West will leave Mosul–Kirkuk in our hands?' ... Is it conceivable that the United States will allow an area in which it wants to establish a Kurdish state to remain under Turkish control? ... But he could not think of such things because he had no historical sense, because of his cultural deficiencies. ... He tried to govern the state with the mentality of a merchant."<sup>176</sup>

One senior American official pointed out that it would have taken them three months to get their forces positioned in the southeast' and argued that the TSK command "objected more to the procedure than the substance of Özal's policy-making."<sup>177</sup> Indeed, Turkish constitutional provisions required Parliamentary approval for deploying troops abroad and allowing the US to use Turkish military bases, effectively equating to a declaration of war. Özal's proposal led to heated debates in the Parliament, resulting in a "compromised resolution" that authorized troop deployment without declaring war in September 1990. The Parliament approved the government's request to send troops to the Gulf, marking a significant departure from Turkey's traditional foreign policy. Özal defended his policies, accusing opponents of being outdated and failing to understand the new international dynamics. This marked a shift from the cautious policies of previous leaders like Menderes and Demirel, reflecting Özal's confidence driven by internal political changes. Indeed, the ideological dilemma faced by his opponents, coupled with the end of the Cold War undermining leftist and Kemalist values, further bolstered Özal's position. However, Özal's actions were viewed as a deviation from Kemalism, leading to the resignations of key government figures and military officials who opposed his approach. The end of 1990 witnessed the resignation of Foreign Minister Ali Bozer and Chief of General Staff General Necip Torumtay, who criticized Özal's policies as reckless and adventurist, highlighting a fundamental disagreement over Turkey's role in the conflict.<sup>178</sup> This internal political crisis underscored the broader struggle between Özal and other political and military elites and that his ambitious plans were curtailed. On January 17, 1991, as the air war in the Gulf commenced, Parliament renewed its war powers vote, permitting coalition air forces to use Turkish

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<sup>175</sup> Hale, 1992.

<sup>176</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 73.

<sup>177</sup> Idem.

<sup>178</sup> Torumtay, N. (1993). *Orgeneral Torumtay'ın anıları* (1. baskı). Milliyet Yayınları.

bases for attacks on Iraq. Özal viewed Turkey's contribution as crucial, claiming that Turkey had proven its reliability to the world.<sup>179</sup> As Ahmad noted, "Özal took matters into his own hands and placed the country squarely behind President Bush's policy."<sup>180</sup>

However, the aftermath of the conflict presented significant challenges, particularly the influx of Kurdish refugees fleeing Saddam Hussein's suppression. This humanitarian crisis forced Turkey into a reluctant role, highlighting the unintended consequences of Özal's proactive policy, whose strategic objectives included the hope that the war would lead to Saddam's downfall and the establishment of a democratic regime in Iraq, which could negotiate with the Kurds and prevent the PKK from using northern Iraq as a base. He perceived this as an opportunity for Turkey to benefit from the post-war situation, with some speculating about potential territorial gains in the north of Iraq. Özal was determined to ensure Turkey backed the winning side in the conflict, contrasting this with İnönü's cautious stance during World War II. When Parliament and the government hesitated, Özal bypassed them, engaging in direct diplomacy with the White House and manipulating public opinion to pressure Parliament into supporting the Western position. This activism was criticized by Republican-Kemalist and leftist groups, who feared it might entangle Turkey in the war and compromise its sovereignty. At the same time, also public opinion and journalists suspected a hidden agenda aimed at encouraging Iraq's Kurds to establish a separate state of their own. This, it was feared, would provide a model for independence that Turkey's Kurdish population might pursue.<sup>181</sup> Özal's hopes were dismantled by the outcomes, which underscored the limitations of his strategy: economic sanctions were costly for Turkey, did not weaken Saddam's regime, and the PKK's position in northern Iraq was strengthened. However, Hale suggests that Turkish policies during the crisis did not significantly deviate from previous approaches, which focused on maintaining friendly relations with Middle Eastern states while upholding Western alliance commitments. The notion that Turkish policy during the Gulf Crisis was a "one-man show" by Özal can thus be challenged by showing that there was a compromise between his ambitions and domestic opposition. Key elements of his agenda, such as Turkish participation in a land force and a "second front" against Iraq, remained unrealized due to internal resistance. As Robins noted, President Özal's action in helping to isolate and confront the Iraqi regime greatly endeared him to the US administration and the White House. This, in turn, brought benefits on a broad front – from greater access to American markets for Turkish textiles to help improve the quality of military hardware possessed by the armed forces. The US now appears to

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<sup>179</sup> Hale, 2012, 161.

<sup>180</sup> Ahmad, 2000, 105.

<sup>181</sup> Çancı, H., & Şen, Ş. S. (2012). Turkish Politics and Policies under the Impact of the 1980's PKK Revolt and the Gulf War of the Early 1990s. *European Review*, 20(2), 222–232.

place more excellent value on the importance of Turkey than before.<sup>182</sup> President Özal declared Turkey's new foreign policy position:

Many things have changed in Turkey... The days of taking a cowardly and timid position are over in foreign policy. From now on, we will pursue an active policy based on circumstances.<sup>183</sup> I believe Turkey should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy.<sup>184</sup>

A result of the interpretation privileging differences in style over substance is the dismissal of the notion that Özal contemplated significant military action against Iraq. As Ambassador Abramowitz put it:

I never took any of that seriously... I thought that was basically...Özal ruminating and none of that was serious...I don't think he wanted to change borders. I don't think that was on his mind.' But is this interpretation – shared by most American and some Turkish observers correct? How far did Özal's ambitions really extend? Özal himself publicly acknowledged that neither the great powers nor the other regional actors would react favorably to the Turkish occupation of Mosul and Kirkuk and insisted that he did not covet anyone's territory.<sup>185</sup>

On the other hand, however, Mufti notes that in an off-the-record conversation on 19 January 1991 about what would happen if Iraq lobbed missiles at Turkey, Özal replied: "I wish it would!...If it fires missiles, a second front will be opened."<sup>186</sup> His Prime Minister Yıldırım Akbulut later recalled:

Did Özal put forward such words, such ideas? Yes. I, as Prime Minister, we, as the government, let him know in a variety of ways that under no circumstances would we carry out such a thing. ... It is out of the question for us to open a front. ... He accused us of cowardice, of not knowing what to do.<sup>187</sup>

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was another contentious foreign policy issue for the Özal-Demirel condominium. Turkey had long advocated respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the states as its traditional foreign policy approach and became the only country to support Azerbaijan. In contrast, the USA was inclined to side with Armenia, and Russia did not hesitate to support Armenia directly. Initially, Turkey pursued a policy of neutrality, positioning itself as an impartial mediator between conflicting parties. Although Armenia was initially cautious about Turkish involvement, it did not immediately oppose Ankara's efforts. Turkish diplomats, particularly Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin, engaged in several rounds of shuttle diplomacy in the region and European capitals, bringing the issue to the OSCE agenda. Çetin,

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<sup>182</sup> Robins, P. (1997). Turkish foreign policy under Erbakan. *Survival*, 39(2), 85.

<sup>183</sup> Ahmad, 2000, 201.

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Robins, 1997, 70.

<sup>185</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 73.

<sup>186</sup> Demirkol, F. (2002). *Diktatörleri uyku tutmaz*. Der Güncel, Der Yayınevi, 132.

<sup>187</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 74.

responding to Azerbaijani requests, leveraged his Western connections to highlight the conflict, including a direct call to US Secretary of State James Baker. Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel defended this cautious approach, arguing that there was no legal basis for Turkish intervention and Azerbaijan had not requested it. In examining Azerbaijan's relations with Turkey, it can also be mentioned that Azerbaijan never officially requested a Turkish intervention in the conflict. According to Azerbaijan's ambassador in Ankara, Mehmet Novruzoglu Aliyev, the primary support Azerbaijan wanted from Turkey was to use its Western alliance contacts to show Azerbaijan's side of the story to the world.<sup>188</sup>

However, Turkey's attempt at neutral mediation was short-lived due to statements from President Turgut Özal, which compromised Turkey's position in Armenia's eyes. Following the massacre of Azerbaijani civilians in Khojaly in late February 1992, massive anti-Armenian demonstrations erupted in Turkey, with calls for intervention in support of Azerbaijan. The government could not ignore these public demands. Özal made several statements suggesting that Armenians should be "frightened a little," which alarmed Armenians both in Armenia and the diaspora, leading them to accuse Turkey of planning a "new genocide against Armenians."<sup>189</sup> However, as Armenians were accused of committing mass killings against the civil Azeri population, domestic pressures significantly hindered Turkey's ability to maintain a neutral stance in the conflict. Public opinion was overwhelmingly pro-Azeri, with widespread outrage over the Armenian military advances in Karabakh and Azerbaijan proper, particularly inflamed by images of fleeing Azeri refugees. The Turkish press criticized the government's mild response to the Armenian advances. Generally, it lamented Turkey's weak performance in the Caucasus and Central Asia, contrasting it with its aspirations of becoming a regional leader.<sup>190</sup>

At the same time, the opposition seized this opportunity to criticize the government. Criticism for inaction while the Azeri brethren were being massacred came from virtually all political directions. Alparslan Türkeş, leader of the MHP, was a natural critic in advocating for Turkish military intervention, stating that "Turkey cannot stand idly by while Azerbaijan's territory is being occupied."<sup>191</sup> Former Prime Minister and Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Partisi*, DSP) leader Bülent Ecevit warned that Turkey's failure to show unequivocal support for Azerbaijan could

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<sup>188</sup> Cornell, S. E. (1998). Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: A Delicate Balance. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34(1), 60.

<sup>189</sup> See desecrated document from FBIS-WEU, quoting news agency Anatolia, United States. (1992). FBIS report. Central Eurasia. *Central Eurasia*, 3 v., 3 v. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009050417>. Also see Giragosian, R. (2000). Turkish-US Relations: The Role of the Armenian Issue. *Transatlantic Policy Quarterly*.

<sup>190</sup> Uslu, N. (2003). The Russian, Caucasian and Central Asian aspects of Turkish foreign policy in the post-cold war period. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 2(3&4); Cornell, 1998.

<sup>191</sup> FBIS-WEU, 1992.

undermine its prestige in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.<sup>192</sup> However, perhaps the most vital challenge to the government came from the prominent opposition leader and head of the Motherland Party, Mesut Yılmaz, who called for deploying troops along the Armenian border and reminded the public of Turkey's guarantor status over Nagorno Karabakh.<sup>193</sup> Naturally, the government could not avoid being influenced by this increasing pressure. In response, Özal wanted to amass support for Azerbaijan, including full military backing. By the middle of March, Demirel also started altering his stance. However, he more cautiously stated that he was under severe pressure to take more decisive action and did not rule out a Turkish military intervention. In any case, Turkey had to restrain its ambitions because of the risk of escalations with Russia threat, which was described by Turkish Chief of General Staff, General Doğan Güreş, in June 1994 as “posing a greater threat to Turkey than it used to during the Cold War and the incumbent Prime Minister’s cautious policy.”<sup>194</sup> This helped Prime Minister Demirel to disperse the negative image of the government after its non-alignment in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, especially in Turkish public opinion, and justify his policy decision, making the case that “a Turkish intervention on Azerbaijan’s side would only result in putting the whole world behind Armenia.”<sup>195</sup> When the Elçibey government was ousted in June 1993 by a coup orchestrated by Colonel Surat Husseinov, that brought Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan’s leader during the Brezhnev era, to power, this development was perceived as a loss for Turkey and a gain for Russia. It mirrored a pattern in former Soviet republics like Georgia and Lithuania, where former Soviet leaders returned to power. This power shift was interpreted by many in Turkey and the West as evidence of Turkey's inability to maintain a friendly regime in Azerbaijan and preserve its influence there. In Turkey, some voices expressed concern that Elçibey’s fall signaled the end of the Turkish model.<sup>196</sup> As Cornell notes, “It is clear that unlike Elçibey, who gave priority to Turkey, Aliyev [could play] the Turkish card whenever it suits his purposes, but [could] turn his back to Ankara as well if necessary.”<sup>197</sup> Indeed, already in September 1993, he annulled many agreements signed between the Elçibey administration and Turkey, ordered Turkish nationals to seek visas before entering Azerbaijan, and dismissed 1,600 Turkish military experts serving in the country. Overall, this case demonstrated that domestic politics, including the stance of the President, Parliamentary support, and intense public pressure, could not be enough to influence the government to make decisions regarding the military involvement of Turkey in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict. According to Cornell,

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<sup>192</sup> Cornell, 1998, 0.

<sup>193</sup> FBIS-WEU, 1992.

<sup>194</sup> Başlanmı, C. (1994), *Güreş'in Sözleri Moskova'yı Kızdırdı*, Milliyet. Saturday 4 June, 17.

<sup>195</sup> Çakir, 2014, 170.

<sup>196</sup> Kut, G. (1993, June 24). Elhibey'in sonu, Türkiye modelinin sonudur. *Cumhuriyet*.

<sup>197</sup> Cornell, 1998, p. 62.

Turkey's policies in this context were influenced by five main factors, which collectively constrained its actions despite domestic pressures and public opinion favoring stronger support for Azerbaijan.

Firstly, the principles of Kemalism, which traditionally discouraged any form of adventurism abroad, significantly constrained Turkey's actions. According to this doctrine, Turkey should not engage in conflicts abroad unless they involve areas considered morally or belonging to Turkey, like Cyprus and possibly Northern Iraq. Since Azerbaijan was recognized as an independent and sovereign state, Turkey was expected not to intervene in its conflicts. Nationalist politicians, particularly Alparslan Türkeş, argued that Azerbaijan was as significant to Turkey as Cyprus, but the government adhered to the original interpretation of Kemalism. Despite Mesut Yılmaz's assertion that Turkey could move its troops within its territory without external approval, this principle was a limiting factor.<sup>198</sup> Secondly, Turkey's alliance with Western countries, which preferred to stay out of the conflict and sometimes tacitly supported Armenia, was a significant limitation. Western pressure, mainly through NATO, discouraged Turkey from involving itself on Azerbaijan's side, fearing an escalation of the conflict that could lead to a confrontation with Russia and possibly involve Iran. Turkey's aspirations for EU membership and its reliance on US military aid for combating the PKK also played significant roles. Western leaders used a mix of incentives and threats to ensure Turkey aligned with their policies, fearing repercussions like a possible arms embargo if Turkey supported Azerbaijan more overtly.<sup>199</sup> Thirdly, Turkey's relationship with Russia was another critical point. The significant trade volume between Turkey and Russia, which far exceeded its combined trade with Azerbaijan and Central Asian states, necessitated maintaining good relations with Moscow. Additionally, Turkey's dependence on Russian markets and the prospect of purchasing arms from Russia to broaden its sources of weaponry influenced its cautious approach. The consistent and forceful responses from Moscow whenever Turkey signaled intentions to support Azerbaijan further restrained Turkish actions.<sup>200</sup> Fourthly, the historical context of the 1915 Armenian genocide heavily influenced Turkey's policy. Since the 1970s, Armenians, especially in the US, have lobbied for the recognition of the genocide, which Turkey vehemently denies, framing it as a time of mutual chaos and loss of lives. This legacy created a fear in Ankara that supporting Azerbaijan too overtly could be framed by the Armenian diaspora as a plan for new atrocities against Armenians, as evidenced by the backlash to President Özal's statement about frightening the Armenians. This historical burden also led to a more lenient government policy towards Armenia than the public sentiment in Turkey

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<sup>198</sup> FBIS-WEU, 1992.

<sup>199</sup> For a discussion on Turkish-US relations, involving the Kurdish and the aid issues, see Aykan, 1996.

<sup>200</sup> For a discussion of the Moscow-Ankara rivalry, see Bolukbasi, S. (1997). Ankara's Baku-Centered Transcaucasia Policy: Has It Failed? *The Middle East Journal*, 51(1), 80–94.



might otherwise allow. Lastly, the international reaction to Turkey's 1974 invasion of Northern Cyprus served as a precedent that influenced Turkish behavior regarding Karabakh. Both cases involve Turkish kin subjected to aggression, with Turkey claiming guarantor rights. However, the heavy international pressure and consequences after the Cyprus intervention likely tempered any enthusiasm for a similar intervention supporting Azerbaijan. The fear of international backlash and the need to maintain favorable relations with Western Europe and Russia discouraged a more active Turkish involvement.<sup>201</sup>

Taken together, the Gulf War and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict show colliding evaluations within the Turkish government and the gap between Turkey's ambitions and realities. First, compared with Menderes and Demirel's timid attitude in the face of army opposition, Özal's self-confidence was significant. Second, the main reason behind this confidence can also be traced to the fact that, as Özal expressed, his "foreign policy was a result of his internal policies."<sup>202</sup> In addition, his opponents were in an ideological dilemma with the end of the Cold War liquidating most of the leftist and Kemalist values that prevented them from providing any policy towards Iraq and the US. Thus, this ideological dilemma helped Özal in shaping a new foreign policy. This proactive stance during the Gulf Crisis marked a significant departure from Turkey's traditional foreign policy, reflecting a rising ambition to elevate Turkey's strategic importance in the post-Cold War era. Despite facing substantial domestic opposition and the limited realization of his broader strategic goals, Özal's actions underscored a shift towards a more assertive and active Turkish foreign policy. This period highlighted the complex interplay between domestic political dynamics, institutional coherence, and strategic objectives in shaping Turkey's role on the international stage.

### **5.2.2. The Ciller Government. Unpredictable Activism and Turnarounds**

The critical conjunctures that opened up with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War epitomized not only the different positions within the Turkish establishment's apparatuses on specific matters but also a more complicated picture of different visions for Turkey's role and identity where global scenarios overlapped with domestic restructuration. Therefore, it is crucial to examine

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<sup>201</sup> See issues of the newspapers *Zaman*, as well as a statement by the head of the Turkish state's Directorate for Religious Affairs, Mehmet Nuri Yilmaz, in FBIS-WEU, 1992, quoting *Türkiye Radyoları*.

<sup>202</sup> Except Bülent Ecevit and Mümtaz Soysal, who argued that Turkey should oppose the UN-led campaign, almost all opponents of Özal were in favor of implementing the UN decisions, including Erdal İnönü, President of the leftist-Kemalist SHP, Süleyman Demirel, leader of the right-wing The DYP and the former coup leader and former President Kenan Evren. See *Milliyet*, 6-78- August 1990; *Hürriyet*, 8-9 August 1990. İnönü further suggested an international army against Saddam (see *Hürriyet*, 7 August 1990), while Ecevit opposed any military action against Iraq (see *Milliyet*, 26 December 1990).

how Turkey's strategic interests and material capabilities during that period were sometimes reinforced and sometimes undermined by immaterial elements like ideology and religion at various levels of society.

As mentioned earlier, between 1993 and 1996, Turkey experienced a transitional period in its security environment. Domestically, the awakening of suppressed identities, particularly among Kurds, posed a significant threat to the political regime. Efforts to counter this threat, such as enhancing the Turkish Armed Forces' military capabilities and developing socio-economic projects like harnessing the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, intensified the crisis's transnational dimensions, leading to conflicts with several neighboring countries. Additionally, the collapse of the Soviet bloc removed the Cold War-era predictability and stability from Turkey's external security calculations. With traditional guideposts gone, security policy became polarized. Advocates of a more activism strategic culture paradigm pushed for a bolder, more revisionist approach, while supporters of the Republican paradigm urged caution and restraint. Among the latter, some Kemalist factions, believing that the end of the Cold War could jeopardize the Turkish economy, security, and democracy, suggested a return to the early Republican policy of isolation. They argued that the West's aim in the post-Cold War was to disintegrate Turkey, as the Kurdish problem and the European rejection of Turkey's application demonstrated.<sup>203</sup> This contrasted with Özal's understanding that "the twenty-first century will belong to the Turks"<sup>204</sup> However, his sudden death on 17 April 1993 caught most by surprise and unprepared. Indeed, while the following governments seemed to recognize the changing world system after the end of the Cold War in their programs,<sup>205</sup> the intent to avoid Özal's risky attitude and, at the same time, to pursue ambitious policies to augment Turkey's international role resulted in a hectic implementation in different scenarios. Indeed, one can address these inconsistencies by looking at the turbulence that affected Turkey's internal and external grounds in the period.

Indeed, since Demirel decided to take over the Presidency, a new Prime Minister and leader of the DYP (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, DYP) had to be found. Unexpectedly, a special party convention elected Tansu Çiller, who took over the premiership on 25 June 1993. The first Çiller Government was formed in June 1993 as a coalition with the SHP. Her election aroused high hopes because of her liberal personal and professional background and because the appointment of a woman Prime Minister in a Muslim country was regarded as an important milestone. However, she came to power

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<sup>203</sup> Cumhuriyet, 27 December 1989; Hürriyet, 2 January 1990.

<sup>204</sup> Hale, 2002, 194

<sup>205</sup> TBMM. (1993, July 6). *T.C. Resmi Gazete*. 21629. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/21629.pdf>, 5-8. It was always included that a multi-dimensional foreign policy should be pursued to cope with the emerging perils of the post-Cold War world.

during a drastic restructuring of Turkish political parties. On the one hand, some old figures continued to be present. Besides Demirel's ascendancy to the Presidency, Bülent Ecevit founded a new DSP, advocating a left-wing nationalism "strongly wedded to a centralized unitary Turkish state."<sup>206</sup> Necmettin Erbakan reconstituted his anti-Western Islamist movement under the RP. Moreover, the MHP continued to adhere to a statist nationalistic and nativist hardline even after Alparslan Türkeş died in 1997 when his son failed to move the party in a center-right direction and "relinquished its leadership to the 'old-style, classic-minded' Devlet Bahçeli."<sup>207</sup> More problematic for Çiller was that her ally, the new SHP, particularly after leadership passed from Erdal İnönü to Murat Karayalçın in September 1993, sought to reformulate the CHP's legacy along liberal West European lines. An early indication of this came in the 1991 national elections when the SHP allowed a group of Kurdish activists to run for Parliament under its banner.<sup>208</sup> The growing gap between the DSP and SHP on such vital issues suggested to some observers a further fragmentation of the old CHP consensus into an "anti-Western and Third Worldist faction and a pro-Western modernizing faction."<sup>209</sup> A parallel process took place with the SHP's counterpart on the center-right that, after the departure of Özal and the more conservative elements in the party, saw the ANAP progressively losing its cross-class quality.<sup>210</sup> Its leader Mesut Yılmaz, like Karayalçın, advocated integration into Europe and occasionally expressed liberal sentiments as well, asserting, for example, that "we do not believe that the methods utilized by the armed forces today [in the southeast] are the correct methods."<sup>211</sup> In synthesis, as Mufti describes, the actors who would determine security policy following Özal's death were:

a TSK seeking to reconcile old dogmas with new imperatives and capabilities; an MFA struggling to assert institutional autonomy and its 'Peace at Home, Peace in the World' outlook; a President who upheld convention above all, praising 'continuity,' denouncing 'adventurism' and always reminding everyone that 'the Sèvres plan is still in operation'; a relatively smaller group that remained attracted to Özal's neo-Ottoman approach; a mobilized populace at the base only just beginning to play an unprecedented role" And at the center of it all a Prime Minister who, depending on one's feelings about Özal, personified either a parody or the logical culmination of Özalism: opportunistic populism, unrestrained appetite, and pure will unguided by coherent vision.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>206</sup> Barkey, H. J., & Fuller, G. E. (1998). *Turkey's Kurdish question*. Rowman & Littlefield Publ, 11.

<sup>207</sup> Author's interview with former MP of the MHP.

<sup>208</sup> In December 1994, Karayalçın, acknowledging that "Özal's approach was right," went so far as to urge his countrymen to 'discuss and debate the idea of federation for the South-East.' See Kirisci, K., & Winrow, G. M. (2013). *The Kurdish Question and Turkey* (0 ed.). Routledge, 139."

<sup>209</sup> Keyder, Ç. (2004). *Ulusal kalkınmacılığın iflası* (3. basım). Metis, 124. Viewed from the perspective of diehard Left Kemalists such as Mümtaz Soysal, the distinction was between fidelity to the CHP's Jacobin roots on the one hand and capitulation to the "barren" ideology of "Northwest European social democrats" and the "swindle known as globalization" on the other.

<sup>210</sup> Under the dominance of its liberal wing, during the 1990s ... [ANAP] increasingly became the principal representative of the urban bourgeoisie, which has naturally benefited from the globalization process. See Öniş, Z. (2000). Neoliberal Globalization and the Democracy Paradox: The Turkish General Elections of 1999. *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), 283–306.

<sup>211</sup> Yılmaz quoted in an interview with Düzel, N. (1995, April 2). We Would Hold Them Accountable. *Hürriyet*.

<sup>212</sup> Mufti, 2009, 76.

In other words, Çiller's period seemed to diverge from the old establishment vision about the *modus operandi* of TFP. For instance, Demirel himself displayed a more cautious approach during his Presidency. He referred several times to the Sèvres Treaty, arguing that Turkey could never win the support of the West, however hard it tried to democratize its internal political system.<sup>213</sup> For some, this complaint may have been voiced partly as an excuse not to implement the needed improvements in Turkey's human rights regime, but it also struck a sympathetic chord with nationalist opinion at home.<sup>214</sup> Seemingly, Demirel sought to underline the "Turkish model" concept by emphasizing Turkey's secular values and claiming that

Turkey is a democratic country, a free country, and has adopted a free market economy. All these values are compatible with Muslim values through secularism. As a secular model, Turkey proves to the world that Muslim countries could adopt the Western economic style and social policies.<sup>215</sup>

For others, it had more of a strategic implication that rested on the fact that Turkey could not afford to provoke any open conflict with the United States over an essential part of American policy in the Middle East and the Caucasus. On these and similar grounds, the Turkish military chiefs, who continued to maintain close relations with their American counterparts, were firmly in favor of continuing operations like "Provide Comfort" in Iraq with the idea that, as long as the military coalition force was based in Turkey, then the Turks retained at least some leverage over how it was used.<sup>216</sup>

In contrast, Tansu Çiller showcased a more ambitious, determined, and fearless attitude that initially sought to appeal to a broad audience.<sup>217</sup> However, she encountered a combination of hostile situations: Karayalçın's power base evaporated when the SHP voted to incorporate itself into the CHP, under the leadership of the more orthodox Hikmet Çetin, in February 1995; the ANAP's questionable links to business interests cost Yılmaz credibility both with the public and with the bureaucracy; and during her turbulent tenure as PM from June 1993 to February 1996 Çiller disappointed virtually all the hopes vested in her. First, during the three governments she founded

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<sup>213</sup> Aykan, 1996, 357, note 57; see also Kirisci, K. (1998). Turkey and the United States: Ambivalent Allies. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 2(4), 39-51. '2. On the Sèvres syndrome in general, see Jung, D. (n.d.). The Sèvres syndrome: Turkish foreign policy and its historical legacies. *American Diplomacy*, 8(2). <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2003/08/the-sevres-syndrome/>.

<sup>214</sup> Hale, 2012, 162.

<sup>215</sup> Süleyman Demirel (1992) speech given at Istanbul Bosphorus University on April 9, (unofficial translation). Quoted in Kara, M. (2017). *Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World: An Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy from 1980 to 2014 through the Perspectives of Role Theory and Operational Code Analysis* [PhD Thesis]. Eastern Mediterranean University, 134.

<sup>216</sup> Aykan, 1996, 354-5; see also Gunter, M. M. (1997). *The Kurds and the future of Turkey* (1. publ). Macmillan, 98-99.

<sup>217</sup> To the defenders of the Republican order, she seemed the perfect product of Kemalist social engineering: a Westernized woman committed to upholding Atatürk's vision. To its critics, she seemed a promising heir to Menderes and Özal before her. And to observers in Washington, as one former American Ambassador in Ankara put it, "she was viewed as one of a triumvirate of young new leaders, along with Karayalçın and Yılmaz. That, of course, turned out to be an absolute joke." See, for example, Cizre, Ü. (2002). Tansu Çiller lusting for power and undermining democracy. In M. Heper & S. Sayari (Eds.), *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*. Lexington.

between June 1993 and October 1995, Turkey suffered from severe economic problems. Hyperinflation rate, high public sector debts, and a growing deficit in the balance of payments caused one of Turkey's most severe financial crises in January 1994.<sup>218</sup> Second, after assuming a more international dimension by the beginning of the 1990s, Kurdish separatism headed by (PKK) became more violent during these years. In addition, a significant issue in the foreign policy bureaucracy during the Çiller rule was the rapid changes in the Minister of Foreign Affairs post: in approximately over two and half years, six different Ministers were in charge of foreign affairs, making it difficult to conduct a stable and efficient foreign policy. Thus, a fiasco in economic policies, escalation in Kurdish separatist violence, and failure of the governments to deal with this threat encouraged Çiller to adopt a more nationalist stance, which implied leaving the army greater room for maneuver, implicitly delegating some of the civil government's rights to the military.<sup>219</sup> Çiller's approach to the Kurdish issue indicated her broader political strategy. Before becoming Prime Minister, she was reportedly interested in the "Spanish model" of devolving power. She proposed a reform package that included legalizing Kurdish-language radio and television broadcasts.<sup>220</sup> However, once in power, she faced strong opposition from the security establishment and nationalist media, which led her to make a U-turn. This also overlapped with pressure from the military, which re-gained its power through success in the counterinsurgency campaign against the PKK and a continuing central role in opposing religion in political life.<sup>221</sup> This meant that to "gain political victory in the Kurdish issue," Çiller needed the military on her side.<sup>222</sup> Therefore, she changed the party line manifesto regarding civilian rule over the military and avoided taking any initiative on the subject. Within a month, she made "anti-terrorism" the cornerstone of her Kurdish policy, transforming the DYP into the party most committed to a military solution to the Kurdish question.<sup>223</sup> This shift involved lifting the Parliamentary immunity of pro-Kurdish deputies for their arrest and imprisonment, allegedly sanctioning extrajudicial operations against suspected PKK sympathizers, and deploying paramilitary "special teams" to intensify the campaign in the southeast. While this hardline stance dismayed

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<sup>218</sup> Meyer, J. H. (1998). Politics as usual: Ciller, Refah and Susurluk: Turkey's troubled democracy. *East European Quarterly*, 32(4), 489-90.

<sup>219</sup> Sakallioğlu, Ü. C. (1996). Liberalism, democracy and the Turkish centre-right: the identity crisis of the true path party. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32(2), 142-161.

<sup>220</sup> Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997, 30.

<sup>221</sup> Larrabee & Lesser, 2003, 28.

<sup>222</sup> Cizre, 2002, 92-3.

<sup>223</sup> Barkey & Fuller, 1998, 113.

liberals, it pleased the security forces.<sup>224</sup> In November 1993, Chief of Staff Güreş praised her “decisiveness” and “extreme courage,” describing her as “more manly than thirty men.”<sup>225</sup>

Çiller’s foreign policy followed a similar pattern. For instance, after she had initially pressured Turkish Cypriot leader Denktaş to accept confidence-building measures from the US and the EU in late 1993 and early 1994, unfavorable domestic reactions provoked a shift to a more aggressive stance, leading to accusations of “garnering domestic electoral support.”<sup>226</sup> The broader societal mobilization during this period gave politicians new opportunities and constraints. Hikmet Çetin, Foreign Minister from 1991 to 1994, also acknowledged the presence of Bosnians, Albanians, Circassians, Arabs, and Azeris in Turkey, many of whom wanted Turkey to be more active in regional conflicts.<sup>227</sup> However, after Çiller vocal expression in favor of Turkey’s direct involvement in the Caucasus, he insisted that Ankara’s adherence to the “fixed National Pact borders and Atatürk’s ‘Peace at Home, Peace in the World’ principle precluded such involvement.” In this sense, Republican elites saw Çiller’s responsiveness to public opinion on security policy as irresponsible. Their concerns grew when she revealed limited knowledge of or interest in foreign affairs, preferring to rely on advisers like the academician Emre Gönensay and diplomat Volkan Vural but disregarding their advice when politically convenient. Gönensay later confirmed that Çiller “was more interested in domestic politics than in making foreign policy.” At the same time, Vural noted that she had Özal’s instincts but “with less knowledge of the world.”<sup>228</sup> As such, one can note that Tansu Çiller was caught between more activist and conventional approaches. Her temperament often headed to act aggressively in foreign policy, as seen in her approach to Azerbaijan. However, her tendency to accommodate various influential groups – voters, generals, and Americans – “hindered her ability to formulate a coherent and consistent security vision. Despite her courage and spirit, she lacked the judgment and discipline that characterized Özal’s statecraft both domestically and internationally.”<sup>229</sup> Others have a more balanced evaluation according to which, “ultimately, she seemed to lack neither courage nor spirit; only the judgment that disciplined Özal’s statecraft at home and abroad.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> In January 1994, two months after Çiller announced that she possessed a list of Kurdish businessmen who had provided financial support to the PKK, the first in a series of as many as sixty unsolved murders of Kurdish businessmen occurred. See Bildirici, F. (1998). *Maskeli leydi: Tekmili birden Tansu Çiller* (5. baskı). Ümit Yayıncılık, 278-79. A study commissioned by a Turkish business group in mid-decade found that of the Turkish Kurds polled, 12.2 % wanted an independent Kurdish state, 40.0 % wanted a federation with Turkey, and 12.1 % wanted ‘autonomy’ within Turkey, see the report Doğu, E. (1995). *The Eastern Question: Diagnosis and Observations. TOBB Special Investigation Report*.

<sup>225</sup> Arcayürek, C. (2001). *Etekli demokrasi*. Bilgi Yayınevi. pp. 114–115, 191.

<sup>226</sup> Bahçeli, T. (2001). Turkey’s Cyprus Challenge: Preserving the Gains of 1974. In D. Kairidēs & D. Triantaphyllou (Eds.), *Greek-Turkish relations in the era of globalization*. Brassey, 217.

<sup>227</sup> see, for example, Hikmet Çetin, quoted in Arcayürek, 2001, 9.

<sup>228</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 96.

<sup>229</sup> Interview with former “political friend” of Özal.

<sup>230</sup> Mufti, 2009, 121.

Yet, Mufti argues that it would be “erroneous to attribute the erratic and often aggressive policies of this period solely to Çiller.” As they sought to reassert their control over security policy, the Republican elites faced a significant conceptual challenge. Their commitment to the “Peace at Home, Peace in the World” doctrine had been straightforward in the past, as maintaining the old regime and an isolationist stance seemed inherently connected. This explains their opposition to Özal’s ambitions, which they rightly saw as a threat to both components of this doctrine. In the 1990s, however, the transnational nature of Islamism and Kurdish nationalism became more evident, compelling Turkey’s security establishment to engage in international actions to address domestic threats. For instance, in March 1995, the Turkish army intervened in Northern Iraq, Operation Steel, in an attempt to fill the political vacuum left by the Gulf War. Facing pressure from the harsh statement by the Foreign Ministry’s Information Office, in her “Address to the Nation” on 25 March 1995, Tansu Çiller declared that “We will put an end to terrorism”<sup>231</sup> This rhetoric seemed to be in line with the views shared by influential figures like General Orhan Yoney (of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces),<sup>232</sup> Hikmet Cetin (the leader of the CHP and the Deputy Prime Minister)<sup>233</sup> and Bülent Ecevit (leader of the DSP).<sup>234</sup> However, not everybody shared the same idea. Within the Turkish Parliament, a small group of Parliamentarians questioned how the decision to intervene was taken and presented the Parliament with a “suggestion for a general discussion” in the Turkish Grand National Assembly about the intervention decided on by the Turkish Armed Forces. As Müftüler-Baç notes, these inconsistent declarations about the operations.<sup>235</sup>

demonstrated the lack of coordination between various branches of the government and that the real decision maker [was] the Turkish Armed Forces with the upper hand belonging to the Chief of Staff, General İsmail Hakkı Karadayı. The civilian authorities bowed to the wishes of the military.” This becomes particularly evident when considering that the operation was not discussed in advance in a cabinet meeting or the Parliament.<sup>236</sup>

Ironically, “ensuring ‘Peace at Home’ made maintaining ‘Peace in the World’ increasingly challenging.”<sup>237</sup> Additionally, improving the TSK’s technical and strategic capabilities during the 1990s led to a

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<sup>231</sup> The declaration was: “the PKK, due to lack of authority in Northern Iraq, has intensified its activities against the Turkish Republic from this region. Aimed at protecting the lives and security of innocent people, the operation will be of limited duration and the forces involved will be withdrawn immediately following the elimination of the targets.” Quoted in Müftüler-Baç, 1996, 261.

<sup>232</sup> He declared “Turkey’s aim is to clear areas adjacent to its border where Iraqi Kurdish groups are no longer in authority of a PKK presence and thus prevent an increase in terrorism inside Turkey’. The aim is to stabilize and neutralize the PKK influence”. Idem.

<sup>233</sup> He summarized the aims of the intervention as: (1) to destroy PKK’s logistic and military bases in Northern Iraq; (2) to safeguard civilians within the region where the operation is conducted; and (3) to ensure that Turkey would withdraw, and that this is a limited intervention. Idem.

<sup>234</sup> “Although Ankara had denied that a buffer zone would be created in the area even though, Ecevit favored the idea of a buffer zone.

<sup>235</sup> Mufti, 2009, 121.

<sup>236</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 1996, 262.

<sup>237</sup> This quote was “supplied” to different interviewees who agreed with the statement.

psychological shift, marked by increased self-assurance and satisfaction derived from exercising power.” Some elements of the TSK command demonstrated a readiness and even eagerness to engage militarily with Greece, Iraq, and Iran. Nevertheless, they lacked a normative justification for their assertiveness—a renewed alignment between security needs and strategic culture that could elevate their various military operations beyond a disorganized attempt to restore a long-lost status quo.<sup>238</sup>

#### 4.2.1.3. *A View from the Military*

Another element worth considering is that as the TSK grew more powerful militarily, it also gained ground institutionally. Its persistent campaign to absorb the SSM – and failure to bypass it altogether in negotiating foreign contracts – led to warnings of an erosion of “civilian influence in the decision-making process about strategic issues.”<sup>239</sup> More significantly, the TSK’s institutional reach increasingly extended into the general formulation of security policy. Özal’s authority had obscured this process to some extent, but already under him (and indeed mainly in reaction to him), the TSK had begun developing its own foreign policy research and analysis capabilities, signaling the end of the traditional relationship between the TSK and the MFA in which the former deferred to the latter’s expertise.<sup>240</sup> Most frustratingly for the diplomats, the TSK reportedly set up what a retired high-ranking MFA official described as a “virtual replica foreign ministry with desks covering the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, Greece, and Cyprus.”<sup>241</sup> As another Turkish diplomat saw it, the generals’ reliance on their resources led to a growth in their ambitions. It brought about “the current situation in which they impose their will in foreign policy.”<sup>242</sup>

One should recall that this resulted from gradual changes over time to understand such dynamics. While this process of review of strategic priorities was already in motion within the military since late 1989, it assumed a more official outlook in 1992, when Chief of Staff Dogan Güres presented to the MGK the first major reformulation in twenty years of what press reports referred to as the Turkish National Security Policy Document (*Türk Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi*), an authoritative statement of strategic priorities. As observers noted, it articulated a shift in the national “defense concept” from emphasizing threats posed by Russia and Greece to those emanating from

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<sup>238</sup> Mufti, 2009, 122.

<sup>239</sup> Sarıbrahimoğlu, L. (1997). Military Bid for Turkish Agency. *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 27(42), 10. and Sarıbrahimoğlu, L. (2000). Turkish Military Stamps Authority on Procurement. *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 33(6).

<sup>240</sup> Jenkins, G. (2013). Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics (1st ed.). Routledge, 50.

<sup>241</sup> Interview. See also Özcan, G. (2001). The Military and Foreign Policymaking in Turkey. In B. M. Rubin & K. Kirişçi (Eds.), *Turkey in world politics: An emerging multiregional power*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 41.

<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 91. The quote goes further by saying “This is a very bad thing for Turkey... We need someone willing to tell them to mind their own business... Ironically, they are now in a “position to drag Turkey into more dangerous adventures than Özal ever did.” Echoing him, the retired MFA official blamed rising TSK influence for Turkey’s “assertive and bellicose [*hırçın*]’ foreign policies during the 1990s.”



Syria, Iraq, and Iran, together with formulas to cope with internal challenges such as Islamist radicalism and Kurdish separatism.”<sup>243</sup> Nonetheless, this did not imply a homogeneity of views between the MFA and the TSK. One faction within the Ministry acquiesced to the military TSK’s lead on security issues, supporting the hardliner stand on Cyprus and considering initiatives that threatened to elicit concessions – particularly Turkey’s efforts to join the EU – with skepticism. A second school of thought within the MFA resented the military’s overbearing role. It pushed for EU integration to bring Turkey closer to Western political norms and expand the civilian power in security matters.<sup>244</sup> While such liberal tendencies created significant tensions between the TSK and the MFA, the latter could not alleviate its continuing marginalization in decision-making.

In this regard, one question is whether the growth in TSK power and assertiveness signifies reconsidering the Republican strategic culture paradigm.<sup>245</sup> Emre Gönensay, who served as FM during the mid-1990s, rejected the notion of any fundamental change, arguing that the TSK’s greater readiness to engage with the United States and Israel, for example, reflected “very pragmatic considerations” such as the desire for new technologies, and that culturally it remained “as suspicious of the West’ as ever.”<sup>246</sup> A book published by the Turkish General Staff in 1995 confirmed the steadiness in strategic culture, alleging that the West still sought “to resurrect Sèvres by promoting an ‘Israeli–Kurdish–Armenian axis’ and creating a Greater Kurdistan incorporating southeast Turkey as well.”<sup>247</sup> The book’s language is particularly virulent, but its central thesis that the outside world wishes Turkey ill – continued to be widely shared.: “No great power wants a country in this region that does not put that power’s interests first and refuses to be pushed and shoved around.”<sup>248</sup>

Overall, two inferences can be made from these reflections about the limits of the change in TSK thinking.<sup>249</sup> On one hand, both domestically and regionally, objective transformations necessitated significant, even unprecedented, responses. On the other hand, those responses were consistently influenced and shaped by a strategic culture paradigm that remained unchallenged at the highest levels of the TSK. This interplay between external realities and internal convictions explains the curiously ambivalent nature of Turkish security policy during the rest of the 1990s, which was at times timid and at other times aggressive. As Sıtkı Egeli noted, Turkish policy-makers seemed to

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<sup>243</sup> Özcan, G. (1994). Türkiye’de Siyasal Rejim ve Dış Politika 1983-1993. *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, 2, 520.

<sup>244</sup> Jenkins, 2001), 50. This was confirmed during interviews with former and current military members.

<sup>245</sup> Mufti, 2009, 89.

<sup>246</sup> Seemingly, in his preface to “Toward the Open Seas”, Navy Commander Güven Erkaya insisted that TSK doctrine remained rooted in “Peace at Home, Peace in the World.” General Halis Burhan likewise asserted: ‘I personally cannot imagine going beyond maintenance of the existing status quo. See Tutak, E. (2023). Cumhuriyetin 100. Yılında Türk Deniz Kuvvetleri’nin Dış Politikada Artan Etkisi. *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi*, 14(100. Yıl Özel Sayısı), 108–126.

<sup>247</sup> Kocaoğlu, M. (1995). Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa İsyanı (1831-1841). *OTAM(Ankara)*, 198.

<sup>248</sup> Idem.

<sup>249</sup> Mufti, 2009, 93.

have concluded that, despite ideological and political stance, Turkey could no longer be assured of “full alliance support; it would need to formulate new measures in terms of security policy and force structures.”<sup>250</sup>

#### 4.2.2. The end of the Çiller Era and the Rise of Islamism

During the last phases of the Çiller ruling coalition, as the government program included significant remarks about relations with the EU and a primary target, the government could hail it as a victory when the Customs Union agreement was signed in March 1995. However, these results were insufficient to prevent this fragile administration from reaching its peak of deterioration. First, during this period, the SHP merged with the re-established CHP in February 1995, transforming the coalition government into a different partnership. The rise of Deniz Baykal as the head of the “new CHP” created further disagreements on several policies within the government, particularly in the economic realm. The lack of confidence arising from a long and abrasive political rivalry between the coalition’s center-right parties complicated governance. Second, in October 1995, Çiller established a new government with Yılmaz, a minority administration that failed to receive a vote of confidence in Parliament and was short-lived. Third, the final blow came with the public recriminations between Yılmaz and Çiller over corruption and political abuses, which eventually led to the dissolution of the government, with Çiller withdrawing from the coalition and Prime Minister Yılmaz resigning.

In this sense, the elections of December 1995 confirmed the fiasco of the post-1980 constitutional restructurings in bringing political stability. In this context, the center-right and center-left found themselves as divided as ever, split into two parties each: Tansu Çiller’s DYP and Mesut Yılmaz’s ANAP on the right; Bülent Ecevit’s DSP and Deniz Baykal’s CHP on the left. Even more disturbing for the military and the old political establishment was the failure in countering or marginalizing the main anti-establishment, Turkist, and Islamist parties. In this context, Necmettin Erbakan’s Refah Partisi won the elections with 21.4% of the vote, becoming the first declared Islamist party in government in the history of Republican Turkey.<sup>251</sup> Therefore, to understand the repercussions of TFP, it is fundamental to analyze the factors that contributed to the rise of this new movement and how its relations with the establishment affected the decision-making process.

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<sup>250</sup> Egeli, S. (1993). *Taktik balistik füzeler ve Türkiye*. TCMSB Savunma Sanayi Müsteşarlığı, 84, 87.

<sup>251</sup> Yavuz, M. H. (1997). Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey. *Comparative Politics*, 30(1), 63-82.

Accordingly, RP's electoral success was "a testament to the movement's grass-roots organizational efficiency"<sup>252</sup>, which addressed what the interchangeability of the mainstream parties could not. Indeed, all four major political formations proved unable to reconceptualize the state's unitary, secular, and centralized character and remained mired in the fault lines of Republican political culture.<sup>253</sup> "As they scrambled to accommodate an increasingly diverse electorate and an increasingly globalized business community, therefore, the only differences they could exhibit were of nuance rather than principle."<sup>254</sup> Significant differences and proposals could not be discerned in foreign and security policy either, with all four mainstream parties more or less in favor of accession to the EU – partly as a way of getting out from under the military's thumb and partly in response to business interests but otherwise having all but ceded decision-making authority to the TSK. Moreover, others believe that Erbakan's success resulted from the failure of political parties to address Turkey's economic and political problems.<sup>255</sup> Whatever the reasons for RP's success, Tansu Çiller reversed her previous stand of fierce opposition to political Islamism. This allowed her to ally with Necmettin Erbakan, resulting in a coalition between their two parties, which took office on 26 June based on a mutual agreement that would see an alternate of the two leaders in the Premiership post.<sup>256</sup> As such, this overheated the struggle between the state elite and the governing elite and created a situation in which an Islamist and a secular party struggled to accommodate each other's visions and actions.<sup>257</sup>

Taking the foreign policy implementations of the RP–DYP government as a whole, Robins describes this dueling in the orientations, origins, aims, and divergent policies of two partners in a coalition as a "division of labor."<sup>258</sup> As will be seen in the following section, both parties conducted policies in parallel with their intentions as far as circumstances permitted, meaning that while the RP tried to improve relations with Muslim countries, the DYP became an outlet of the government to the West in general and to the EU in particular. Moreover, tension between the partners arose because the RP did not inform the DYP and part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about many foreign policy

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<sup>252</sup> The Refah Party's success has been widely attributed to its capacity to blend good management at the local level in many municipalities and a "new conceptualization of the welfare state against the old corrupted establishment." See, White, J. (2011). *Islamist mobilization in Turkey: A study in vernacular politics*. University of Washington Press. See also Onis, Z. (1997). The political economy of Islamic resurgence in Turkey: The rise of the Welfare Party in perspective. *Third World Quarterly*, 18(4), 743-766; Güalp, H. (2001). Globalization and political Islam: The social bases of Turkey's Welfare Party. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33(3), 433-448.

<sup>253</sup> For a good historical perspective from the Islamist camp, see Çağlar, İ. (2012). The Welfare Party and the February 28 Process: A Historical Analysis of Turkish Conservatives' Move to the Center. *Turkish Journal of Politics*, 3(1), 21-36

<sup>254</sup> Mufti, 2009, 124.

<sup>255</sup> Sayarı S. (1996) "Turkey's Islamist Challenge," *The Middle East Quarterly*, 3(3), pp. 35-43; Onis, 1997; Güalp, 2001.

<sup>256</sup> The reasons for this choice are debated. "Zürcher claims that Çiller decided to form a coalition with the RP "because the RP offered to suspend the Parliamentary investigations into her financial dealings in exchange for her support." Zürcher, 2017, 298-9.

<sup>257</sup> Robins, P. (1998). Turkey. Europe in the Middle East, or the Middle East in Europe? In B. A. Roberson (Ed.), *The Middle East and Europe: The power deficit*. Routledge, 160.

<sup>258</sup> Robins, 1997.

issues initiated and conducted by Erbakan and his executive staff.<sup>259</sup> Nonetheless, a closer examination of Erbakan's stances before and during his period in government highlights a more nuanced picture, suggesting that the realization of his objectives was influenced and constrained by internal and external parameters.<sup>260</sup> On the one hand, it is indisputable that the RP tried to pursue a foreign policy that was congruent with its worldview and its pro-Islamist and conservative electorate's expectations.<sup>261</sup> In its political campaigns and manifestos, the party adopted a discourse that included vital anti-western elements in general and anti-American, anti-European, anti-Zionist, and even anti-Semitic aspects in particular. In this respect, the membership process of Turkey to the EU was criticized for the fact that the European Union was regarded as "a Christian club"<sup>262</sup>:

The EU is an integration model based on a Christian-Western culture; it is a political integration and an effort to create a European State. It is a Catholic European Union established according to a Christian ideology. Turkey is a Muslim country. To increase [the] material welfare of the Turkish people, to try to have a place in the European Union means to abandon our political, social, and cultural values. If Turkey joins the EU, our sovereign rights will be transferred to the Catholic EU. The decision to be a member of the EU was made against the will of our nation, and the application should be withdrawn for the future of our nation.<sup>263</sup>

Erbakan also argued that "Turkey should cooperate with Muslim countries through which she can realize the goal of being a leader, instead of being a servant in the EU."<sup>264</sup> This aligned with his ambition to promote collaboration with other Islamic countries, "an Islamic common market, an Islamic NATO, an Islamic UNESCO, and an Islamic monetary unit."<sup>265</sup> During their time in the opposition, the RP deputies consistently voted to cease Operation Provide Comfort's mandate in Iraq. Erbakan himself accused the US of being "an occupation force in Turkey and a second Sèvres" and further stated that the "operation benefited both Armenia and the PKK, the main instigators of the 13-year insurgency in the south-east of the country. Provide Comfort, he stated, was secretly aimed at dividing Muslim countries."<sup>266</sup>

Indeed, his first foreign policy moves seemed coherent with this understanding. During his approximately one-year tenure, he exclusively visited Muslim countries for official state visits, which

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<sup>259</sup> Özkeçeci-Taner, 2005.

<sup>260</sup> Tachau, F. (2000). Turkish political parties and elections: Half a century of multiparty democracy. *Turkish Studies*, 1(1), 128–148.

<sup>261</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, Y. (2003). *Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity: A Constructivist Approach* (1st ed.). Routledge, 66.

<sup>262</sup> Gülalp, H. (1999). Political Islam in Turkey: The Rise and Fall of the Refah Party. *The Muslim World*, 89(1), 22–41.

<sup>263</sup> The following statement made by Hasan Dikici, a member of the RP, at the Turkish Grand National Assembly on July 6, 1993 underlines the RP's philosophy. See TBMM. (1993, 7). *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*. <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d19/c027/b053/tbmm190270530145.pdf>.

<sup>264</sup> Erbakan, N. (1991). Türkiye'nin Meseleleri Ve Cozumleri: PROGRAM, 11.

<sup>265</sup> Özbudun, E. (2006). From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. *South European Society and Politics*, 11(3–4), 543–557.

<sup>266</sup> Gülalp, 1999.

seemed to underline his rejection of Turkic ethnic identity as a legitimizing strategy.<sup>267</sup> His first international visit was to Iran in August 1996, where he advocated for improved relations and signed a \$23 billion gas deal. This agreement drew criticism from Western governments, who labeled Iran a ‘rogue state’ due to its alleged support for terrorism. Despite warnings from the U.S. Department of State and intelligence reports from MIT indicating Iranian support for the PKK, Erbakan dismissed these concerns, suggesting the intelligence agency was influenced by the CIA and MOSSAD.<sup>268</sup> This was the initial step of a ten-day trip that included other Muslim countries in Asia to facilitate the realization of his long-advocated idea of forming a group of developing Muslim countries known as D-8, which included Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. The group’s first meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers was held in Istanbul on 22 October 1996, followed by a second meeting in January 1997. Erbakan’s second official trip abroad occurred in October 1996, including visits to Egypt, Libya, and Nigeria.<sup>269</sup> However, at this point, the contradictions and the power limitations behind his approach already showed their backlash. In Egypt, Erbakan encountered a cold welcome and harsh criticism for his sympathy for the opposition Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>270</sup> In Libya, Muammar Qaddafi denounced Turkey in front of reports for coming “under American control, for concluding an accord with Israel, the enemy of Islam, and for repressing the Kurds.”<sup>271</sup> This kind of misadventures illustrated the limitations of his foray into international affairs because “in reality, from the first day he assumed office, he either had to go along with the security establishment on every important issue or was sidelined by it.”<sup>272</sup> For instance, although Erbakan pursued pro-Islamism in interstate relations of his political background, he departed from his traditional line in Turkey’s relations with Western allies and in interactions with Western institutions. During his rule, he ratified a military collaboration and education agreement with Israel signed in January 1996, 495. Robins and Heper et al. argue that Erbakan’s behavior regarding the relationship with Israel was an opportunist attitude to prevent confrontation with the military.<sup>273</sup> This is because the agreement was reportedly subjected to considerable TSK arm-twisting. Chief of Staff Karadayı led a delegation to Israel without informing the government. In April, Erbakan faced the ultimate humiliation of greeting the visiting Israeli Foreign Minister, David Levy, in front of television

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<sup>267</sup> Mufti, 2009, 126.

<sup>268</sup> Hürriyet (1996, August 12), *Erbakan’ın MIT Gafi*. Quoted also in Robins, 1997. See also an interesting TV reportage, Oda TV (Director). (1996). *Erbakan’ın tarihi damga vuran Kaddafi görüşmesinde neler yaşandı* [Broadcast]. [https://youtu.be/XffhGVdNj3Y?si=I6BdfNllvn5l\\_qhF](https://youtu.be/XffhGVdNj3Y?si=I6BdfNllvn5l_qhF)

<sup>269</sup> Sayarı, 2000.

<sup>270</sup> The Egyptian delegation kept his plane waiting on the tarmac for two hours before clearing his arrival, and then failed to raise the Turkish flag during the reception ceremonies.

<sup>271</sup> One Turkish newspaper wrote that a “barefoot Bedouin stood in front of Erbakan...and hurled insults at Turkey.” Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 121. See also Oda TV, 1996.

<sup>272</sup> Idem.

<sup>273</sup> Idem.

cameras. In the aftermath, the pressures from the military were highlighted by one Israeli diplomat: “Is Erbakan a pragmatist if the army puts a gun to his head and tells him to sign?.”<sup>274</sup>

Similarly, against his vocal opposition to the US-led operations in Iraq, his government approved the extension of the mandate. While specific presentational changes had been made, with the name “Operation Provide Comfort” being retired and replaced by “Operation Northern Watch” to depoliticize the operation’s nature, the Turkish opposition and public dismissed these gains as cosmetic.<sup>275</sup> Important to note is also that the TSK continued to mount military incursions into northern Iraq without even informing the Prime Minister until after the event.<sup>276</sup> The RP’s approach towards the EU might be seen as slightly different.<sup>277</sup> The RP had long been philosophically hostile towards the EU as an institution while wanting to maintain commercial ties with European companies.<sup>278</sup> Yet, Erbakan seemed to soften his position. Rather than wanting to reject the union in its entirety, he began maneuvering to renegotiate its terms. As regards the Customs Union with the EU, which had been signed and came into force before the RP and DYP coalition government was formed, Erbakan and his team had a softer approach. He was not opposed to the Customs Union but wanted the agreement to be renegotiated to change articles that were disadvantageous to Turkey. Some argue that Erbakan grounded his objection to the Customs Union on the complaints of small and middle-sized business owners who constituted part of RP’s electorate.<sup>279</sup> Others see it as a strategy to maintain harmony among the coalition partners, given that improving relations with the EU with the purpose of full membership to the union had been an overriding goal of the DYP.<sup>280</sup>

#### **4.2.2.1. The Military and the “Post-Modern Coup”**

As already underlined, the fact that Erbakan had to negotiate his ambitions in the Middle East and his adherence to NATO and the EU Customs Union made it clear that once in office, he had to operate within the parameters of the established consensus. For instance, to ease the preoccupations

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<sup>274</sup> Eralp, A. (1992). Turkey and the European Community: Forging New Identities along Old Lines. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 8, 14.

<sup>275</sup> Bartos, P. P. (2007). A Day on Northern Watch. *Air Power History*, 54(1), 17–21.

<sup>276</sup> Mufti, 2009, 128.

<sup>277</sup> Taniyici, S. (2003). Transformation of political Islam in Turkey: Islamist Welfare Party’s pro-EU turn. *Party Politics*, 9(4), 463–483.

<sup>278</sup> In the words of Abdullah Gül, one of Erbakan’s closest advisers, a Minister of state and the leading moderate within the Parliamentary party, ‘Our opposition to the European Union is based on the idea that we are from a different culture, we have a different identity and a different economic structure than European countries’. Robins, 1997, 86.

<sup>279</sup> Taniyici, 2003.

<sup>280</sup> Thus, Erbakan stated after the EP’s ratification: ‘We are not against the customs union. We are against the form of the agreement, the text, and the way it is applied. Erbakan’s sentiments were supported by the Istanbul-based Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (MÜSİAD), an increasingly important Islamist organization, many of whose members support the RP. Quoted in Kinzer, S. (1996, December 27). Turkey Sending Envoy to U.S. to Clear Up “Misunderstandings”. *NY Times*, A12.

in the West, he also dispatched two pragmatic advisers, Fehim Adak and Abdullah Gül, to Washington in early 1997, bearing assurances that the US had “no reason to be afraid of anything we are doing.”<sup>281</sup> However, this transition from radical positions to more moderate moves convinced neither the Turkish establishment nor Ankara’s traditional allies. Instead, it only underlined that the distance between the rhetoric of the past and the imperatives of the present proved too great to bridge. In addition,

the way in which he tried to gain trust at home and abroad backfired because of his miscalculations about one fact: for the military, bureaucracy, and Washington, a relaxation of tones was not enough. What they wanted was the return to secular, moderate, and pro-Western parties of the past.<sup>282</sup>

From the US, the apprehensions for an eventual Islamist turn and difficulty dealing with Turkey were voiced by former Ambassador Abramowitz, who declared: “How do you deal with a NATO ally led by a man who is fundamentally anti-NATO, fundamentally antisemitic and fundamentally pro-Islamist, even when he’s largely behaving himself?”<sup>283</sup>. Domestically, when the RP came to power, it created deep worry and anxiety among the Westernized elite, most of whom were in the state bureaucracy, political life, the security establishment, and the business sector.<sup>284</sup> The general concern was that an Islamist government, the first in the Republic’s political history, would change the principles and functions of the secular Turkish state.<sup>285</sup> Firstly, the elites were concerned that an Islamist government would impose pressure to change their lifestyles, enforcing an Islamic way of life that conflicted with their secular and republican values. Secondly, they feared that their privileged positions in both the public and private sectors would be threatened and potentially replaced by pro-Islamist individuals over time. One modality for the army to express its criticism of and dissatisfaction with the government’s policies is the National Security Council meetings, which gathered politicians and the security establishment once a month. Moreover, the army started to organize briefings intended for more comprehensive public opinion, ranging from the media to bureaucracy, from business circles and the judiciary to university staff, in which the audience was informed. It warned that Kemalist values and the secular republic were under threat because of the RP’s policies in the coalition.<sup>286</sup> Tensions gradually increased between the party and the elites, including the military, media, the judiciary, academia, and business circles. This resulted in the top military officers taking legal action against their adversaries in Turkish courts and boycotted firms believed to support the

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<sup>281</sup> Idem.

<sup>282</sup> Interview.

<sup>283</sup> Quoted in Robins, 1997, 99.

<sup>284</sup> Heper & Sayarı, 2002.

<sup>285</sup> White, J. B. (1997). Pragmatists or ideologues? Turkey’s Welfare Party in power. *Current History*, 96(606), 25.

<sup>286</sup> Heper & Sayarı, 2002.

Islamic cause. Civil society also mobilized against the government, with several NGOs, such as the Support for Modern Life Association, the Contemporary Education Foundation (*Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*), and the Atatürkist Thought Association (*Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*), organizing campaigns to oppose Erbakan's policies.

At this point, it is relevant to outline that, together with the 1982 Constitutional amendment that equalized civilian and military members of MGK by decreasing the number of civilian members, the capacity of the TSK for directing political decision-makers in foreign policy through the MGK increased in the second half of the 1990s.<sup>287</sup> As Gürpınar summarized, the soldiers determined what would be considered to be a security issue, and the opinions of the military members were the last words to be heard after proposals of the President and the Prime Minister were raised.<sup>288</sup> Besides, the attention of MGK on foreign policy issues seemed to increase compared to previous periods.<sup>289</sup> Ultimately, concerning the change in foreign policy orientation of the military, it is safe to state that

the end of the Cold War radically altered the military's understanding from securing the country's regime against Soviet threat to securing the country from the close neighbors against their so-called support to separatist and Islamist movements which were regarded to have a final target for dividing Turkey.<sup>290</sup>

Moreover, the military's attitude towards MFA bureaucracy changed in this period because it believed diplomats softened their understanding of security concerns and preferred a "conciliatory stance." In this regard, Özcan reveals some other sources of the increasing role of the military in foreign policy making in that period where intense cross-border operations of the military against PKK on the one hand and Elekdağ's newly developed concept of "Two and a half war strategy"<sup>291</sup> for Turkey's security increased the security concerns and accelerated military's role.<sup>292</sup> This intense participation of the military in policy making even reached a stage in Erbakan's Prime Ministry mandate that resembled a "two-staged foreign policy in which the military's foreign policy worked together with Erbakan's government policy where these two policies conflicted," and the mighty General Çevik acted as the "foreign affairs minister" of the military.<sup>293</sup> In addition to these initiatives, a significant legislative change occurred with the signing of the Prime Ministry Crisis Management

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<sup>287</sup> Ünlü Bilgiç, T. (2009). The military and Europeanization reforms in Turkey. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(5), 804.

<sup>288</sup> Gürpınar, B. (2013). Milli Güvenlik Kurulu ve Dış Politika. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 10(39), 73–104.

<sup>289</sup> In MGK meetings' public statements, foreign policy agenda consisted of 60% total agenda between 1991-2003 and this proportion was only 19 % for the meetings between 1985-1991/471. Idem.

<sup>290</sup> Interview.

<sup>291</sup> Elekdağ, 1996. See note on page 54.

<sup>292</sup> Özcan also notes that the military even did not inform the government about those cross-border operations. Özcan, G. (2010). The Changing Role of Turkey's Military in Foreign Policy-Making Process. *Revista UNISCI*, 23.

<sup>293</sup> Uzel, İ. (2003). Between praetorianism and democracy: The role of the military in Turkish foreign policy. *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 34, 1–35.



Centre Regulation by the Council of Ministers on 30 September 1996. This regulation implicitly delegated the authority of the Prime Minister to the Secretary General of the National Security Council (MGK) during crises stemming from domestic and foreign threats affecting national unity in social, cultural, economic, and humanitarian issues. This adjustment can be seen as a move to limit the role of the Prime Minister and increase the influence of the MGK in times of crisis and, precisely, as a response to either the perturbative attitude of Erbakan towards the military or the concerning stance of Çiller in foreign policy making.<sup>294</sup>

These discrepancies amounted to two significant events leading to the end of the RP coalition government. First, when Iran's Ambassador attended the "Jerusalem Day" festivities organized by the RP mayor of Sincan in early February 1997 and used the occasion to call for the imposition of Sharia law, the TSK accordingly decided to make a show of force. Tanks rolled through Sincan, the mayor was taken into custody, and the Ambassador declared *persona non grata*, stating that Iranian meddling in Turkey's internal affairs was intolerable. Second, convinced that Erbakan aimed to dismantle the secular order and disgusted with Tansu Çiller for her cooperation with him, the TSK and the judiciary launched a campaign to oust them. A critical moment occurred at the MGK meeting on February 28, 1997, which presented Erbakan with an 18-point program demanding immediate implementation.<sup>295</sup> Erbakan faced a dilemma: complying with these demands would alienate his electoral base while resisting would incur further wrath from the military. In such an impasse, he briefly resisted but eventually acquiesced, though he delayed implementing the reforms, which only intensified the campaign against his government. Soon after, the High Court of Appeals began proceedings to shut down the RP and bar Erbakan from politics, citing his allegedly subversive past comments. Despite only 11.4% of respondents in a May poll supporting military intervention and some lukewarm warnings from Washington, it was clear that Erbakan was being forced out of office with what became known then as the "postmodern coup d'état."<sup>296</sup>

To conclude, despite his short tenure and obstacles, Erbakan was still able to pose a significant challenge to Turkey's traditional foreign policy. While the institutional and political cleavages prevented him from realizing a full-fledged change in Turkey's external posture, the RP's experience in office spotlighted the issue of Turkish national identity about the external environment. The

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<sup>294</sup> Kürkcü, B. (2019). Decision-Making Process in Turkish Foreign Policy Crises: The Role of State and Institutions During Süleyman Demirel Administrations [PhD Thesis]. MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY, 218.

<sup>295</sup> This program included closing hundreds of religious middle schools, extending compulsory secular education from five to eight years, imposing stricter controls on religious associations, purging Islamists from the civil service, enforcing the ban on headscarves for state workers and university students, and prohibiting anti-secular propaganda on television and radio. Idem.

<sup>296</sup> Aslan, Ö. (2016). 'Unarmed' we intervene, unnoticed we remain: the deviant case of 'February 28th Coup' in Turkey. *British Journal of Middle eastern studies*, 43(3), 360-377.

conflict between the military and political parties underscored that foreign policy preferences and the understanding of national interests were heavily influenced by each actor's identity conceptions and visions deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. As Kemalism remained a cornerstone of the military's identity, Islamic fundamentalism, and its regional sponsors continued to pose the greatest threat to Kemalism and, consequently, to Turkey's national interests. In contrast, the RP rejected Western civilization and its domestic adaptation through Kemalism. Driven by their Islamic ideology, RP members and supporters believed that Turkey's interests lay in fostering close relations with other Muslim countries, viewing the West and its allies as the primary threats to Turkey's original identity. The establishment also faced contradictions regarding its view of democratic values. On the one hand, the army legitimized its February 28 intervention by asserting that combating Islamic activism was crucial "for safeguarding not only the regime but also democracy, societal peace, and a modern lifestyle."<sup>297</sup> On the other hand, throughout the 1990s, the military appeared hesitant to align with the EU's vision of a "democratic Turkey: it often justified its political interventions and breaches of democratic norms as "exceptional" and "corrective" measures against internal enemies and viewed the EU Copenhagen criteria "as democratic compromises that were too costly for Turkey while it was battling regressive movements and separatist terrorism."<sup>298</sup> Indeed, the EU's reform agenda for Turkey focused on four key areas: the position of the Chief of General Staff, the role of the MGK, the composition and jurisdiction of the State Security Courts, and the state of emergency rule in the Southeast. Accordingly, the Chief of General Staff should be accountable to the Minister of Defense rather than directly to the President. However, reality in Turkey still tended to go in the opposite direction: the MGK's role kept expanding significantly, encroaching on areas traditionally managed by civilian authorities, despite international pressures for institutional reform.<sup>299</sup> Thus, the identity frameworks and the group interests held by each participant in the foreign policy decision-making process shaped their perceptions of allies and enemies, leading to conflicting views on formulating and implementing Turkish foreign policy in a way that would influence the subsequent decades of Turkish politics.<sup>300</sup> According to Burak, the "post-modern coup" of 1997 can be referred to as a "Veto Regime," where the military avoided taking direct military control but exercised specific veto power over the government's decision-making process.<sup>301</sup> Seemingly, Aydınli describes the February 28th

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<sup>297</sup> Cizre-Sakallioğlu, U., & Cinar, M. (2003). Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and politics in the light of the February 28 process. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102(2), 314.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>299</sup> Cizre, U. (2004). Problems of democratic governance of civil-military relations in Turkey and the European Union enlargement zone. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(1), 107–125.

<sup>300</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, 2003, 138.

<sup>301</sup> Hale, 2012, 260; Kara, 145.

process as a result of absolutist officials in the military, such as Çevik Bir, who believed in untraditional intervention supported by groups called “unarmed forces.”<sup>302</sup>

#### **4.2.3. Before a Political Earthquake: Ismail Cem’s Visions Towards a New Era**

Despite Erbakan’s hopes to see Tansu Çiller reconstructing a new government, defections from the DYP deprived the coalition of its majority partner. Consequently, with the consent of President Demirel, Yılmaz established a minority government in alliance with Bülent Ecevit’s SHP and other minor formations. Yet, this government managed to hold on to power for only 15 months, weakened by its dependence on uncertain outside support from the CHP. In terms of foreign policy, the coalition government was not successful. Turkey felt humiliated by the EU’s refusal of its candidacy during the Luxembourg Summit 1997, which stressed its need for reform towards the Copenhagen criteria. Additionally, Turkey’s rapprochement with Israel compromised its relations with the Middle Eastern countries as both the Arab League and the OIC condemned Turkey’s alliance with Israel and its “role of servant to the US,” leading to an increased anti-Turkish sentiment in the Arab world.<sup>303</sup> Other than the traditional Cyprus question, another Turkish-Greek confrontation occurred when Greek Cypriots decided to get S-300 missiles from Russia. After the Turkish decision-makers openly threatened to use force to prevent the deployment of the missiles on the island, finally, the crisis was resolved through US and EU pressure.<sup>304</sup> In addition, in October 1998, Yılmaz openly accused Syrian authorities of its support of the PKK and its provision of a base for its leader Öcalan. Still, after threatening to move to war, he finally agreed with Damascus to increase bilateral cooperation in trade and anti-terrorism activities.

On 25 November 1998, after corruption allegations against the government, Baykal withdrew his lifeline, and the government was defeated in a vote of confidence. Meanwhile, although the Constitutional Court ordered the closure of the RP for violating constitutional articles protecting secularism, and Necmettin Erbakan was banned from public office for five years, a successor Islamist party was rapidly formed in the shape of the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP) and nominally under the leadership of Recai Kutan. In this hectic and confused atmosphere, the following 18 April 1999

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<sup>302</sup> It refers to the fact that the army involved the civil society, the media, and the bureaucracy in those frequent meetings meant to delegitimize the government and Erbakan in particular. See Aydinli, E. (2011). Ergenekon, New Pacts, and the Decline of the Turkish “Inner State.” *Turkish Studies*, 12(2), 227–239.

<sup>303</sup> Bacik, G. (2001). The Limits of an Alliance. Turkish-Israeli Relations Revisited. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 23(3), 56.

<sup>304</sup> The missiles were deployed in Crete rather than the Cyprus Island. See Demetriou, M. (1998). On the long road to Europe and the short path to war: Issue-linkage politics and the arms build-up on Cyprus. *Mediterranean Politics*, 3(3), 38–51.

election represented a severe setback for all the traditional parties.<sup>305</sup> Ecevit's DSP emerged as the biggest party in the Assembly.<sup>306</sup> Still, the real surprise was the return of the ultranationalist MHP under Devlet Bahçeli, who succeeded in converting the party to a more moderate but uncertain position and making it the second most significant political force. Although many DSP members had grave suspicions about the MHP, Bahçeli took his place as Deputy Premier in a tripartite coalition with the DSP and the ANAP under Ecevit's premiership, which got into office on 28 May 1999.<sup>307</sup> After Erbakan's period, this coalition government tuned to a growing nationalist course after the perils of the precedent Islamist experiences in Turkish politics. Therefore, the presence of MHP members in the decision-making process contributed to vocalizing nationalist movements that conceived Turkey's national interests principally through an assertive foreign policy. This concretely resulted in Turkey's Syria policy or in its vigorous reaction to a proposed Armenian genocide resolution in the US Congress in 2000.<sup>308</sup> On his side, in the early days, Ecevit was more focused on economic reforms: he successfully implemented the IMF-led economic restructuring programs, and the government was able to decrease inflation and provide financial stability. As a result of favorable foreign policy initiatives, Turkey was declared an EU candidate country during the EU Helsinki Summit in 1999.<sup>309</sup> The significant consequence of this event was the re-emergence of a clearer national role conception for Turkey's place in the world, which was based on a relaunch of the "Turkish Model" concept.<sup>310</sup> Although similar to Özal's understanding of a pro-active stance, in the late 1990s, Turkish foreign policymakers could rely on a "European vest" to mark the country's role as a collaborator in regional subsystems and a model of stability and democracy for an emerging Eurasian reality.<sup>311</sup> One example was the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline agreement between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, which concluded on November 18, 1999, when President Demirel underlined the emergence of Turkey as a "trustable energy hub" between Asia and Europe. In addition, the fact that Turkey also conducted policies by the USA in Iraq and Iran and supported the US intervention in

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<sup>305</sup> Hale, 2012, 140.

<sup>306</sup> Many claims it was also because one of the most important accomplishments of his previous caretaker government was capturing Öcalan in February 1999 in Nairobi, Kenya. See it in Kara, 151.

<sup>307</sup> Hale, 2012, 141.

<sup>308</sup> Larrabee & Lesser, 2019, 10-11.

<sup>309</sup> See Öniş, Z. (2000). Luxembourg, Helsinki and Beyond: Towards an Interpretation of Recent Turkey-EU Relations. *Government and Opposition*, 35(4), 463–483; Park, W. (2000). Turkey's European Union candidacy: From Luxembourg to Helsinki - to Ankara? *Mediterranean Politics*, 5(3), 31–53; Presidency Conclusions, Paragraph 12, Helsinki European Council, December 10–11, 1999, available at [http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/dec99/dec99\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/dec99/dec99_en.htm). See Ecevit, B. (1999, December 11). *Statement of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit In Helsinki On Turkey's Candidacy To The EU*. [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-of-Prime-Minister-bulent-ecevit-in-helsinki-on-turkey-scandidacy-to-the-eu\\_br\\_december-11\\_-1999-en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-of-Prime-Minister-bulent-ecevit-in-helsinki-on-turkey-scandidacy-to-the-eu_br_december-11_-1999-en.mfa).

<sup>310</sup> Bilgin, P. (2004). A Return to 'Civilisational Geopolitics' in the Mediterranean? Changing Geopolitical Images of the European Union and Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era. *Geopolitics*, 9(2), 276. See also Tocci, N. (2005). Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or anchor for reform?. *South European Society and Politics*, 10(1), 73-83.

<sup>311</sup> Cem, İ. (2002). Turkish foreign Policy: Opening new Horizons for Turkey at the beginning of a new Millennium. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 1(1), 2.

Kosovo in 1999 allowed Ankara to present itself as an emerging humanitarian power. Nonetheless, one cannot overlook İsmail Cem's proposals and actions during his relatively long tenure in the MFA to understand the discourses behind this vision.

İsmail Cem, known as one of the ideologues of social democracy in Turkey and a prominent figure in the Turkish center-left of the DSP, served as Foreign Minister from 30 June 1997 to 10 July 2002. In his first press conference as Foreign Minister on 14 July 1997, Cem announced, "We have begun constructing and implementing a new foreign policy."<sup>312</sup> To fully understand the origins of his vision, one should also consider that Turkey's relations with the EU profoundly shaped his stance at the time. Indeed, the 1990s turned out to be a period of "ontological insecurity" for Turkish policymakers who questioned Turkey's identity and geographical location.<sup>313</sup> According to Bilgin, the "discrepancy between Turkish policy makers' 'preferred geopolitical location' for Turkey (Turkey in Europe) and the 'position accorded to Turkey' in EU policy makers' discourse (Turkey in 'non-Europe,' such as the Mediterranean or the Middle East) became a source of contention between the two. Indeed, the European Union's ambivalence regarding the issue of Turkey's membership was viewed by some in Turkey as a rejection of Turkey's 'civilizational commitment' to the West. This commitment has its roots in Kemal Atatürk's foreign and domestic policies.<sup>314</sup> In other words, when the Cold War ended, those in Turkey who sincerely believed in the EC/EU route being a way of no return for Turkey were faced with a major problem. As the European Union sought to relocate itself in the evolving map of world politics, Turkish policy-makers discovered, to their dismay, that the place accorded to Turkey might not fall within the boundaries of "new Europe."

Following the declaration of Agenda 2000, which excluded Turkey from the list of candidate countries, a sense of dismay was widespread among Turks. This sentiment was poignantly expressed on the Turkish MFA website. It recalled that "having played an active role in the demise of the Soviet bloc, it was only natural for Turkey to aspire for inclusion in the new European architecture it helped to build."<sup>315</sup> Indeed, this process created broad dissatisfaction among Turkish politicians and the public. There was a widespread perception of this moment as a setback in their quest for external validation of Turkey's European credentials. The desire to participate in a community of Europeans eventually led leaders to apply for associate membership in the European Economic Community in 1959. After that, the Ankara Agreement signed in 1963 stipulated that Turkey's full membership

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<sup>312</sup> Cem, İ. (2001). *Turkey in the new century: Speeches and texts presented at international fora (1995-2001)* (exp. 2. ed). Rustem Publ.

<sup>313</sup> Sezer, D. 'Turkey and the European Idea', NATO's Sixteen Nations.

<sup>314</sup> Bilgin, 2004, 276.

<sup>315</sup> Relations Between Turkey and the European Union. See <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/ad/adab/reasons.html>.

would be possible when both the EC and the Turkish political elite found that Turkey would be able to meet the obligations of membership. Thus, there was a great deal of encouragement for Turkey to continue on its stated path of becoming part of the community of Europe. The Association Agreement was amended in 1970 with the signing of the Additional Protocol, which stated the ultimate goal of creating a Customs Union between Turkey and the EC by December 31, 1995. After it was frozen because of the 1980 coup, in line with the Commission's recommendation, a customs union for industrial products was realized as foreseen by the Ankara Treaty and the Additional Protocol. It should be noted that "Turkey had been the only country that realized a customs union with the EC before full membership."<sup>316</sup> On November 8, 2000, the European Commission adopted its Accession Partnership Document for Turkey, which was approved in the General Affairs Council of December 4, 2000, and finally adopted by the Council on March 8, 2001. Turkey adopted its National Program to adopt the *acquis* on March 19, 2001. Despite these positive developments, as of the summer of 2002, accession negotiations with Turkey have not begun. Consequently, Turkey is the only candidate country that the EU did not include in its calculations of voting power and representation in the EU institutions made at the Nice Summit in December 2000.<sup>317</sup>

Against this backdrop, Turkish policy-makers sought to play the "security card," highlighting the country's geostrategic importance for Europe. Yet, they did not consider the changing perception of security between Ankara and Brussels in the post-Cold War era. As it expanded its conception to "soft security issues" – like migration, drug trade, and human smuggling – it represented precisely a source of these problems at the doorstep of Europe.<sup>318</sup> This seemingly growing gap between the security perceptions and policies of Turkey and the European Union is viewed by some Turkish observers as "paradoxical" in that

although Turkey fully participates in the European Security Architecture, even here, it encounters problems because it is excluded from the EU's evolving defense arm – CESDP (Common European Security and Defense Policy) – which is part of this architecture. This is an exciting point because security was one of the strong links tying Turkey to Europe and vice versa.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> McLaren, L. M., & Müftüler-Baç, M. (2003). Turkish Parliamentarians' Perspectives on Turkey's Relations with the European Union. *Turkish Studies*, 4(1), 195–218.

<sup>317</sup> Aleskerov, F., Avci, G., Iakouba, V., & Türem, Z. U. (2002). European Union enlargement: Power distribution implications of the new institutional arrangements. *European Journal of Political Research*, 41(3), 379–394.

<sup>318</sup> Bilgin, P. (2004). A Clash of Cultures? Differences Between Turkey and the European Union on Security. In A. L. Karaosmanoğlu & S. Taşhan (Eds.), *The Europeanization of Turkey's Security Policy: Prospects and Pitfalls* (pp. 26–52). Foreign Policy Institute.

<sup>319</sup> Aybet, G., & Müftüler-Baç, M. (2000). Transformations in Security and Identity after the Cold War: Turkey's Problematic Relationship with Europe. *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 55(4), p. 569. Similarly, General Çevik Bir, then deputy chief of Turkish General Staff, gave voice to Turkish policymakers' concerns when he said: 'Even as the importance of collective defense and the transatlantic link is being emphasized within NATO, simultaneously contradictory arguments are also being advanced, which can only be described as "Europe is for the Europeans."' Çevik, B. (1998). *Turkey's Role in the New World Order. New Challenges*. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA394287.pdf>.

Moreover, a survey conducted with Turkish MPs in the 2000s confirmed the gap between them and the EU's understanding of the issues preventing Turkey's full accession. Mentioning the Cyprus issue, the author stated that

the problem [...] is that elites in Turkey do not perceive this issue to be a significant obstacle to Turkish membership of the EU, implying that the other factors are more critical and, if those are resolved, Turkey should still be able to enter the EU even if the dispute with Greece over Cyprus continues. Unless Greek leaders suddenly change their position on this issue, it seems highly unlikely that Greece will allow Turkey to join the EU if Turkey continues with the "position outlined by Ecevit (that there are two separate countries on Cyprus). The failure of our sample of deputies to acknowledge the importance of this problem indicates a lack of understanding of how the voting on the accession of new member states occurs within the EU (by unanimous vote in the EU Council of Ministers, with the permission of the European Parliament and each member state Parliament). Thus, even though Cyprus is not part of the EU's accession criteria, the EU's decision-making structures will make it an equally important factor influencing Turkey's accession.<sup>320</sup>

In reaction to this perceived betrayal of their EU counterparts, Turkish policymakers sought to de-emphasize Turkey's European identity and re-locate Turkey in the Black Sea and Central Asia (the so-called 'Turkic world').<sup>321</sup> A retired general of the Turkish Armed Forces describes Turkey's location in more stark terms:

Turkey constitutes the hinge of the world's islands, which comprise three continents. It is both the lock and the key to this hinge. It connects the Mediterranean and the Black Sea....It brings together and keeps the Balkans, Caucasus, and the Middle East apart.<sup>322</sup>

As Bilgin goes, what seems familiar to all such representations is the emphasis on the diversity in Turkey's geopolitical positioning, reinforcing Turkey's claim to a European identity:<sup>323</sup> "Turkey was not searching for alternatives to Europe. Our European policies have always been complementary to the other dimensions of our foreign policy and vice versa."<sup>324</sup>

In response to these critical approaches, Cem's vision was founded on a negative appraisal of Turkey's traditional foreign policy, which he characterized as being "bereft of a historical dimension," "lacking 'depth' concerning time and "breadth concerning space," and possessing an "inadequate approach to culture."<sup>325</sup> Thus, he said,

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<sup>320</sup> McLaren & Müftüler-Baç, 2003, 213. This research also highlights an important historical background by providing some examples. As they go, "For example, Ecevit's perception of the EC in the 1970s and Özal's in the 1980s seem to be based solely on economic terms, most probably underestimating the political dynamics of European integration. Moreover, some of the constitutional reforms that have been proposed by these elites—especially related to the role of the MGK and to Article 159 of the Turkish Penal Code, which deals with punishments for criticizing the state—indicate a fairly fundamental misunderstanding regarding the sort of reforms the EU is demanding."

<sup>321</sup> Bilgin, 2004, 282.

<sup>322</sup> İlhan, S. (2000). *Jeopolitik yaklaşım*. Ötüken, 34, note 81.

<sup>323</sup> Bilgin, 2004, 283.

<sup>324</sup> Interview with a former Turkish Ambassador.

<sup>325</sup> Cem, 2001, 2-10.

[f]or Turkey, the way forward — particularly in foreign policy — requires a new awareness of her identity and history, her assets and shortcomings. A nation whose foreign policy is alienated from its own cultural roots and historical past [as Turkey has long been] cannot be a serious player on the world scene. Furthermore, in such an environment of alienation, it becomes possible for political and intellectual elites to develop “colonial” mindsets, even in a country that has never been a colony in its long history.<sup>326</sup>

For him, the inadequacy of traditional TFP was mainly manifested in the Middle East, where a “common and positive experience of centuries” was “disregarded, and short-term antagonisms were played up. This then was transformed into a justification to keep at a distance a region and a people whose significance for Turkey’s interests is, in fact, paramount.”<sup>327</sup> He also stressed the identity problem of TFP making, arguing that the tradition of thinking in terms of fundamental choices, such as Islam versus secularism, also led to a perspective that associated foreign policy interests in the Middle East with Islam or Islamization.<sup>328</sup> Therefore, not far from Özal’s view, he suggested a revision of pillars and a newly defined strategy based on the goal of becoming a “world state,” which should emphasize Turkey’s dual identity as a European and an Asian country, elaborating a clearer strategic vision and, being bold enough to operate an ideological and conceptual renewal of TFP. As Altunışık recognizes, like Özal, Cem also emphasized the importance of being assertive. Specifically, in his Middle East policy, he focused on four specific elements: first, the importance of utilizing the historical and cultural assets of Turkey when it comes to this region; second, emphasizing Turkey’s identity as multi-civilizational; third, focusing on the importance of Turkey as a role model in this region in terms of its achievements; and, finally, improving relations with the neighbors and, in general, “reconciling with the Middle East.”<sup>329</sup> Within this general perspective, Cem argued that Turkey had to move beyond the bridge metaphor, as it was inadequate for the twenty-first century, during which Turkey was moving to become a “destination” country.<sup>330</sup> During his tenure, this foreign policy vision was translated into several significant initiatives rooted in the DSP’s traditional region-based approach. He focused on improving Turkey’s strained relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors. Like Özal before him, Cem sought to resolve conflicts through dialogue.

First, a concrete example was his attempt to mitigate tensions with Syria. In March 1997, a senior diplomat was sent to Damascus to convey Turkey’s desire to restart dialogue, particularly concerning Syria’s alleged support for the PKK. This diplomatic move resulted in Cem meeting with his Syrian counterpart during an OIC meeting in Doha. Cem stressed the importance of economic

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 237. See Altunışık, 2009, 71.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 42.



cooperation as a foundation for resolving political issues: “Once the countries become interdependent economically, the resolution of political problems becomes easy.”<sup>331</sup> Due to this meeting, Syria withdrew a critical resolution about Turkey’s water policies on the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. However, broader relations remained tense until the brink of war in October 1998. Following resolving this crisis in the Adana Agreement, Cem declared a forward-looking stance: “We look forward to a new understanding of the neighborhood.”<sup>332</sup> Similarly, Cem initiated efforts to improve relations with Iran. In a meeting at the UN, he and the Iranian Foreign Minister agreed to appoint Ambassadors to long-vacant posts and began a structured dialogue through security meetings. These diplomatic efforts were met with criticism from the Turkish military, concerned about the potential negative impact on relations with Israel. Still, Cem countered these concerns by emphasizing that improved relations with neighboring countries did not hinder Turkish-Israeli relations, as confirmed by the Israeli Prime Minister.<sup>333</sup> Yet, it is essential to remark none of this sat well with the TSK. Even in Iraq, where they shared the general distrust of American intentions, the commanders saw no alternative to the long-standing arrangement wherein Ankara tolerated the northern no-fly zone, and Washington accepted TSK incursions targeting the PKK. In sum,

These differences underscored a fundamental rift in Turkey’s Middle East policy. On one side, the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) maintained a stance of caution, balance, and non-alignment, which was in line with the İnönü Doctrine. Conversely, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) emphasized the necessity of defending the domestic order from external threats. Essentially, both factions operated based on core, yet now conflicting, principles derived from the same strategic culture paradigm.<sup>334</sup>

The institutional balance of power in 1998 was skewed by the frailty of the Yılmaz government, which did little more than issue a “few heroic statements” during the crisis. Consequently, the TSK took the upper hand, escalating Turkey’s assertive military posture. Nonetheless, what holds is that the events of 1998 marked a significant departure from Turkey’s long-standing Middle East policy, and, in line with Cem’s understanding of a new role, it represented a

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<sup>331</sup> See Altunışık, 2009, 172.

<sup>332</sup> Cem, 2001, 86.

<sup>333</sup> Alparslan Esmer, “Israel Asks Turkey for Active Role in Peace Process,” Turkish Daily News, 8 July 1998. This was also facilitated by some sort of inter-party consensus on adopting a pragmatic stance on Israel. Bülent Arınç of the Islamist Virtue Party, for example, affirmed that “it is now necessary to acknowledge the reality of Israel.” Sevkettin Yahnici of the MHP agreed: ‘Maybe in theory you can say Muslims should oppose Israel, but in practice Israel exists in the Middle East and is a reality of the Middle East. ... That being the case, we have to find ways of bringing this thing [the Arab–Israeli conflict] to an end.’ Even he Left Kemalist retired general Kemal Yavuz conceded that Turkish-Israeli relations were “a correct choice...as long as a certain distance is maintained.” Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 202.

<sup>334</sup> Interview. This conversation was based on and found confirmation of what Mufti argues (Mufti, 2009, 135). The interviewee also confirmed that “beneath surface unity, however, discord lingered”. As an MFA official noted that the civilian government is uneasy...because policy was being driven by the military...And the 45-day ultimatum was a mistake, because it dragged Turkey into a no way back situation. If the Syrians had not capitulated, something would have needed to be done. Other “high-ranking military officials” were blaming the crisis on the MFA’s “negligent stand,” pointing out that the TSK had been ‘warning’ it in vain for some time to exert meaningful pressure on Syria.

remarkable “victory achieved without substantial use of force.”<sup>335</sup> This period saw Turkey, for the first time in four decades, on the brink of war with a neighboring Arab state, which was a stark contrast to previous incursions into Iraq, which primarily targeted Kurdish insurgents in areas beyond government control. The tension within Turkey’s prevailing security paradigm became acute as “the principle of ‘Peace at Home’ necessitated the TSK to relentlessly pursue the PKK wherever they sought refuge, while ‘Peace in the World’ pushed the MFA to avoid entanglement in the volatile Middle Eastern conflicts.”<sup>336</sup> Cem’s tenure also saw the launch of the Neighborhood Forum Initiative, aimed at easing regional tensions, particularly concerning Iraq. Despite a regional tour to promote the initiative, it failed due to Saddam Hussein’s regime’s lack of cooperation. Nonetheless, it underscored Cem’s commitment to regional perspectives and confidence-building measures in conflict resolution. Turkey also sought a more active role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. President Süleyman Demirel joined the Mitchell Commission, and in 2002, Cem, along with Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou, visited Israel and Yasir Arafat to encourage peace efforts..<sup>337</sup> His efforts in the OIC culminated in the “OIC-EU Joint Forum: Civilization and Harmony,” where he reinforced his vision for Turkey’s multiple civilizational identities as an asset that could align and integrate with the needs of its Western partners in the region. Notably, he stood out as one of the most pro-European figures in the Ecevit government, emphasizing the harmony between Turkey’s Middle Eastern and Western foreign policy pursuits. At the same time, however, one structural impediment remained strongly present: the privileged position traditionally accorded to the military in Turkey<sup>338</sup> that endured as a source of contention in Turkey-EU security relations. Suffice it to note here that during the 1990s, Turkey failed to adopt broad conceptions of security and experienced a securitization of its foreign policy whereby specific issues were pulled out of the realm of open debate and discussion by declaring them national security issues.<sup>339</sup> Ole Wæver has insight into the reason why Turkish policymakers were so cautious of over-emphasizing the non-European dimensions of Turkey’s identity: “By traditional European prejudices, the more Turkey is seen to turn towards the East, the less it will be deemed “European.”<sup>340</sup>

One last element worth mentioning is also that this policy of “balance” and the enthusiasm for closer relations with Israel amongst the Turkish élite

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<sup>335</sup> Interview.

<sup>336</sup> Mufti, 2009, 135.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 215. Cem’s belief in the potential benefits of historical Ottoman partition models led to a study of Ottoman archives on Jerusalem

<sup>338</sup> Cizre, 2004.

<sup>339</sup> On the role of the military in security policy-making, see Karaosmanoğlu, 2000.

<sup>340</sup> Wæver, O. (1996). Europe’s Three Empires: A Watsonian Interpretation and Post-Wall European Security’. In R. Fawn & J. Larkins (Eds.), *International society after the Cold War: Anarchy and order reconsidered*. Macmillan Press ; St. Martin’s Press, 237.

[was] not shared by the general public. Although there is widespread social prejudice in Turkey against Arabs, in any confrontation between Palestinians and Israelis ... racism is invariably overridden by a sense of Muslim solidarity, tinged with a nationalist nostalgia for Ottoman leadership of the Islamic world.<sup>341</sup>

This conditioned Turkish leaders' policy-making. Particularly after the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in September 2000, Ankara took a robust stance against what President Ahmet Necdet Sezer denounced as Israel's "unacceptable resort to violence against our Palestinian brothers."<sup>342</sup> And while Ariel Sharon lauded the "strategic partnership" between the two countries during a visit the following August, "senior Turkish diplomats were running around Ankara telling anyone who would listen that Turkey's relationship with Israel should not be exaggerated."<sup>343</sup> Overall, this opened up a dynamic that would have proved decisive in the following year. The underlying societal mobilization began to impact Turkey's security policies, generating considerable turmoil profoundly. As public opinion became more influential and aligned more closely with the broader sentiment in the Muslim world, driven by the globalization of information and media, Turkish security elites found themselves increasingly constrained and in a difficult position to elaborate coherent guidelines and discourses both domestically and in foreign policy issues.

Another example is the difficulty in maintaining the aura of "humanitarian and mediating power" in the Balkans after the Kosovo crisis erupted. Despite complaints by Turkish citizens of Albanian descent, Ecevit's government kept its distance from the Kosovars. When Muslim Albanians began agitating for secession from predominantly Christian Macedonia in early 2001, Turkish officials emphatically reiterated their support for that country's territorial integrity as well based on shared security anxiety for the possibility of the rise of independentist movements throughout the region and in Turkey.<sup>344</sup> As such, in the Balkans, as in the Aegean and Cyprus, the policy pursued by Ecevit and Cem and backed by their MHP and ANAP partners "rested on the familiar formula of maintaining correct relations with all parties whenever possible, resisting attempts to revise the status quo, and remaining wary of great power intervention."<sup>345</sup> In its relations with Russia and the Caucasus, Turkey's posture encountered even more impediments. Let alone the Islamist RP statements in favor of the Turks and Muslims of Central Asia, the other parties seemed to have come

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<sup>341</sup> Jenkins, 2001, 76–77. In a 2006 poll, 63 % of Turkish respondents expressed sympathy with the Palestinians, as opposed to 5 % who sided with Israel and 16 % who said 'neither.' See Pew Research Center. (2007). *America's Image in the World: Findings from the Pew Global Attitudes Project*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2007/03/14/americas-image-in-the-world-findings-from-the-pew-global-attitudes-project/>.

<sup>342</sup> SETA. (2003). *Moderate Islam and the New President*. <https://www.setav.org/en/tag/moderate>.

<sup>343</sup> Jenkins, 2001, 77.

<sup>344</sup> Former Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin articulated Ankara's anxieties: "What the Albanian guerillas are doing could spread everywhere...If you open the door to creating ethnic states by force, then it is a very dangerous thing." Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 139.

<sup>345</sup> Idem.

to terms with the MFA's cautious approach of "recognizing Russia's importance in the region while defending the premise that Turkey has a role to play there as well."<sup>346</sup> In practice, "no Özalian thinking found echo within official circles."<sup>347</sup> Ultimately, Turkey's policies in the Middle East in the late 1990s were living a similar condition. Rapprochement with Syria, Iran, and Iraq was based on mutual economic and energy interests, but the structural problems regarding different strategic and ideological views continued to live underground.<sup>348</sup> In a nutshell, these relationships had swung back toward the "Inönü Doctrine ideal": suitable ties grounded in non-interference in each other's internal affairs and the capacity to classify specific issues from the interests of external powers.

To resume how Turkey was entering the 2000s, it is essential to recall Müfti's evaluation.<sup>349</sup> First, responding to the same crisis in the dominant Republican paradigm that animated Özal, Necmettin Erbakan, and Mesut Yılmaz tried to articulate alternative approaches of their own. Both Özal and Erbakan aimed to harness the power of Islamic sentiment, yet their approaches and outcomes differed significantly. Erbakan's ideology, rooted in resentment rather than ambition, proved too narrow to garner widespread electoral support. Conversely, Yılmaz sought to inspire individual ambition and initiative, yet his focus on commercialism failed to appeal to a broader sense of national greatness. Both leaders struggled with a weak political base and could not outmaneuver the entrenched bureaucratic elites.

Consequently, they were forced to relinquish control over security policy to the TSK command and its allies. This led to a peculiar mix of reluctant assertiveness in TFP, which alarmed some neighbors and worried the US. By the decade's end, this assertiveness had successfully pushed back internal and external adversaries, allowing the Republican paradigm to reestablish its dominance in security matters. However, the fundamental issues driving the crisis persisted, and the September 11, 2001 event would indicate that this stability was temporary. These dynamics and limitations impacted on and were impacted by the developments within the country. After 1999, Turkey

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<sup>346</sup> Turkish policy in this arena at the end of the 1990s revolved around two primary objectives: avoiding direct conflict with Russia and preserving the buffer zone constituted by the Transcaucasian states after the Soviet Union's collapse. MFA Undersecretary Faruk Loğoğlu summarized both objectives when he said: 'We do not want to offend Russia. We do not want to provoke it...Our approach is to recognize Russia's importance in the region while defending the premise that Turkey also has a role to play. Even the MHP, so loud in the past about liberating Muslim peoples from the Russian yoke, went along, with deputy party chairman Yahnici suggesting that the Chechens bore primary responsibility for their misfortunes. Idem.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>348</sup> As with Syria, the rapprochement did not eliminate all points of tension. Turkey and Iran remained strategic rivals in the Middle East and the Caucasus, with increasingly potent arsenals at their disposal. Turkey and Iran also remained suspicious of each other on the questions of Kurdish and Azeri separatism respectively. Behind everything else, finally, the ideological divide between secularism and Islamism continued to loom. But the two sides appeared to have reached a *modus vivendi*, Tehran acknowledging Turkey's red lines and Ankara – with its Kurdish and Islamist crises seemingly in remission – displaying more understanding for the complexities of Iranian behavior: "There can never be complete satisfaction. But we have to admit also that the Iranians have their own operational limitations. They try not to allow anything detrimental to Turkey's interests, but power is so diffuse there...The government may want to do one thing ... but then another agency will do something else to sabotage it....Our policy towards Iran therefore requires a more sophisticated approach." Idem.

<sup>349</sup> Interview.

intensified its domestic reforms to align with the Europeanisation process and fulfill the Copenhagen criteria. Although the Ecevit government implemented several political reforms to meet these requirements, it faced significant challenges in domestic politics, marred by economic problems and internal political turmoil. The severe economic difficulties compelled the government to sign agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and adhere to its prescribed policies. The final blow came from the devastating earthquake in the Gulf of Izmit near Istanbul on 17 August 1999, which claimed over 17.000 lives. State agencies, including the army and the Red Crescent organization, were ill-prepared for the disaster. Amid widespread protests against the entire Turkish establishment, an open conflict between Ecevit and President Sezer led to a final catastrophic economic crash.<sup>350</sup> The Ecevit government was disintegrating by the spring of 2002. The Prime Minister's health issue prevented him from performing his duties, and the successful Foreign Minister İsmail Cem resigned to form his own New Turkey Party (*Yeni Türkiye Partisi*, YTP), joined by 58 ex-DSP backbenchers, stripping the government of its majority. Consequently, on 31 July 2002, Parliament voted to hold general elections on 3 November. In this sense, "the earthquake may not have spelled the end of the strong state, as many predicted at the time, but it had certainly left an enduring legacy of dissatisfaction."<sup>351</sup>

### 4.3. The Individual Level

In the precedent chapter, the analysis has centered primarily on the figure of Özal and the impact of the 1980 coup in conditioning the political atmosphere in Turkey. Here, since the "post-Özalian" period witnessed the alternation of many different personalities throughout many coalition governments, it is essential to provide more details about some of the main actors of the period. While Demirel and Erbakan stood out as some of the most long-durée politicians, Çiller represented a "new entry" in Turkish politics. However, as will be highlighted in this section, all of them were highly conditioned by the phase of restructuring that occurred both within and outside the country. In this sense, to understand how these figures "played their game on the internal level," it is crucial to examine how the intermingling between their personal background, party affiliation, and sociopolitical settings highly contributed to shaping their actual policy-making. In addition, these

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<sup>350</sup> In February 2001, Sezer, who was known for his independent and critical attitude towards the cabinet, confronted Ecevit "with files on corruption in government circles and accused him of neglecting this for political reasons during a meeting of the National Security Council. Zürcher, 2003, 304-5.

<sup>351</sup> Larrabee & Lesser, 2003, 25.

three figures were selected because they operated during a period of crisis (or of reflux, at least) in TFP. Indeed, according to decision-making structures, under normal conditions, a chance for a long calculation of all possible consequences, facilitation of potential resources, and coordination between all related institutions enable decision-makers to take solid and stable policy actions. In crisis time, however, time limits, problems of facilitating the resources, the pressure of domestic political factors, and facing an imminent threat brings the issue of an imminent decision which may be the second best or sufficing enough rather than the first best or optimal one, unlike rational decision-making theories, argue.<sup>352</sup> For Houghton, crisis time also brings centralization, a decrease in alternatives and options, increased use of analytical shortcuts, improved communication and argumentation, and increased pressure to attain rationality even though this rationality might be questioned.<sup>353</sup> In this respect, it is more important to fathom how political leaders and institutions are positioned to bring a broader understanding of crisis decision-making.

#### 4.3.1. Süleyman Demirel

There is no place for anger in foreign policy. When I was Prime Minister, in his visit to Turkey in 1967, I asked De Gaulle how he conducted his foreign policy. He replied me that ‘Big states do not conduct their foreign policy on the streets.’<sup>354</sup>

Süleyman Demirel put considerable effort into crafting his image as a representative of the ordinary folk, with the nickname “Sülü the Shepherd” symbolizing his rise from a small conservative village in Isparta to the Prime Minister’s office after achieving high education in Turkey and the US. According to Feroz Ahmad, the rural population saw Demirel as an inspirational figure who could realize their dreams despite his non-military bureaucratic elite background.<sup>355</sup> Demirel positioned himself as a spokesman for the silent majority against the elitist alliance of the military and the CHP.<sup>356</sup> Helped by his nationalistic and Islamic political background, nurtured during his high school

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<sup>352</sup> Houghton, D. (2017). Crisis Decision Making in Foreign Policy. In D. Houghton, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>353</sup> Idem. See also Brecher, M., & Wilkenfeld, J. (1997). *A study of crisis*. Univ. of Michigan Press.

<sup>354</sup> Cited by Mehmet Ali Bayar in interview with him on 23/09/2019 in Istanbul. Quoted in Kürkcü, 2019, 74.

<sup>355</sup> Feroz, A. (2020). *Demokrasi Sürecinde Türkiye (1945-1980)*. Hil Yayınları, 64.

<sup>356</sup> Komsuoğlu, A. (2008). *Türkiye siyasetinde bir lider: Süleyman Demirel* (1. basım). Bengi Yayınları, 257. His position at the State Hydraulic Works and his ambitious projects on irrigation, potable water, and dam construction meant he was later acquainted with Adnan Menderes, the Prime Minister of his time. See also Kürkcü, 2019, 61.

and bachelor years, he entered politics with the newly established right-wing party Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP), founded after the 1960 military coup.<sup>357</sup>

At the beginning of his career, Demirel specifically mentioned, “I didn’t go into politics; I was thrown into politics. Thrown as a result of the reality of Turkey.”<sup>358</sup> After the 1980 military coup, Demirel was banned from politics with his political opponents Bülent Ecevit, Necmettin Erbakan, and Alparslan Türkeş. Nevertheless, he continued to offer his counselor services to active politicians under the nicknames of “Trainer, Technical Director, A Clued-Up,” and finally “The Father” up until the removal of the political ban by the referendum held on 6 September 1987. His lifelong friend, Cindoruk, described him as “a rational and prudent liberal democrat who believed in the rule of law, often carrying a copy of the Constitution in his pocket.”<sup>359</sup> Tuncer highlighted Demirel’s flexibility, pragmatism, optimism, and result-oriented attitude, which allowed him to adapt to changing political dynamics while maintaining a modern democratic stance.<sup>360</sup> Similarly, Heper mentioned his intuitive judgment and innate caution, bridging respect between the civilian government and the military for the sake of democracy.<sup>361</sup> Demirel’s respect for state institutions and bureaucracy stemmed from his experience as a high-level bureaucrat, according to which “You should run the state with the help of bureaucrats. If you ignore them, you suffocate and get stuck.”<sup>362</sup> Others noted that one of the main characteristics that allowed him to be in the long term in politics was a tendency to cooperate with the military and resist it when necessary, such as in selecting presidents and handling constitutional changes.<sup>363</sup>

This explains why, throughout his political career, Demirel’s rhetoric significantly shifted in response to his opponents and the political climate. In the 1960s, he positioned himself as a champion of democracy and the national will, advocating for ordinary citizens against the elitist stance of İnönü’s CHP and the military. By the 1970s, Demirel had moved away from his earlier informative speeches, adopting a more nationalistic and conservative tone. He accused Ecevit of fostering communism, aligning himself with the military to combat it, and sought to consolidate right-wing

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<sup>357</sup> Menderes greatly admired him: “That guy put Turkey in his pocket. Take him now and assign him as Minister. Next time, he may easily be Prime Minister.” Moreover, when he assumed leadership of the party, he benefited from being a young yet quite seasoned former high-ranking bureaucrat with government experience and, at the same time, unburdened by any desire for revenge stemming from the 1960 coup. However, he also faced criticism for allegedly fleeing after the party raid in 1962, being associated with Freemasonry, and an early photograph of him with US President Johnson, infamous for the Johnson Letter on Cyprus. See Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>358</sup> Kürkcü, 2019, 72.

<sup>359</sup> Hüsamettin Cindoruk’s comments on Demirel were available in the printouts of the panel held by Vakıf 2000 and moderated by A. Kurtcebe Temoçin, “Demirel the Legend: In the Memory of the Ninth President Süleyman Demirel”, Vakıf 2000, (23 May 2017), 21-30. Now retrievable in Kürkcü, 2019, 100.

<sup>360</sup> Demir, A. F., & Tuncer, N. (Eds.). (2007). Süleyman Demirel. In *Türk dış politikasında liderler: Süreklilik ve değişim, söylem ve eylem* (1. basım, pp. 125–234). Bağlam Yayıncılık.

<sup>361</sup> Heper, & Sayarı, 2002, 221-29.

<sup>362</sup> Idem.

<sup>363</sup> Çuhadar et al., 2020.

support within his party as rivals Necmettin Erbakan and Alpaslan Türkeş gained prominence. After the 1980s, following a ban from political life due to the 1980 military coup, Demirel's discourse unexpectedly embraced themes of freedom, justice, and democracy, and he began to establish good relations with leftist intellectuals.<sup>364</sup> Indeed, Demirel's approach to foreign policy was shaped significantly by his concerns in domestic politics and his adaptation to systemic fluctuations. An example is his anti-imperialist rhetoric in the late 1960s Cold War period to challenge the Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP), which had gained seats in the Assembly and was seen as Moscow's *longa manus* in Turkey.<sup>365</sup> In general, Demirel's foreign policy can be summarized as realist, pragmatic, cautious, prudent, and non-adventurous. Kılıçoğlu noted that he was always balanced and tried to avoid adventurous policies.<sup>366</sup> Ercüment Yavuzalp, a former Undersecretary of the MFA, reiterated that "Demirel's foreign policy understanding was in line with the traditional [...TFP] and Demirel was brave enough to stand against adventurous foreign policy," which meant adhering to the principle of "peace at home, peace in the world," being cautious about revisionism, maintaining the status quo, and fostering healthy relations with the Western world.<sup>367</sup> In this sense, Demirel emphasized the importance of state tradition, asserting that he pursued and operated the state's foreign policy rather than his agenda. Ambassador Onur Öymen highlighted that Demirel adhered strictly to traditional principles of Turkish foreign policy and republican values, maintained good foreign relations, was firm against foreign pressure, and had a positive attitude towards the MFA bureaucracy.<sup>368</sup> Similarly, Bayar highlighted two critical aspects of Demirel's approach: selecting cabinet ministers who could work harmoniously with state institutions and accepting advisors recommended by the MFA rather than appointing his foreign policy advisors.<sup>369</sup> Indeed, according to Demirel himself, "Foreign policy is the instrument for preserving and strengthening a state's political, economic, and national interest. It is an art of calculating the high interests of a country and the ability to practice it."<sup>370</sup>

Having been overthrown twice and banned from politics due to military interventions, Demirel's post-Cold War political life showed a more cooperative approach with left-wing opponents, even forming coalition governments. His active stance in foreign policy due to the

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<sup>364</sup> Komsuoğlu, 2008, 188.

<sup>365</sup> Kesgin, B. (2011). Political Leadership and Foreign Policy in Post-Cold War Israel and Turkey [PhD Thesis]. University of Kansas, 137.

<sup>366</sup> Kılıçoğlu, G. (2016). Süleyman Demirel ve Dış Politika. In H. Çakmak (Ed.), *Cumhurbaşkanları ve dış politika* (1. Baskı). Kripto, 228.

<sup>367</sup> Yavuzalp, 1996, 146.

<sup>368</sup> See an article about his comments on Süleyman Demirel's foreign policy, Erkiner, E. (2013, October 31). *Onur Öymen'in Almanya Yılları*. <https://bianet.org/yazi/onur-oymen-in-almanya-yillari-118296>.

<sup>369</sup> Quoted in Kürkcü, 62

<sup>370</sup> Ergen, C. (2009). *Cumhurbaşkanı Süleyman Demirel'in söylev ve demeçleri*. Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2001.



changing global dynamics after the collapse of the Soviet Union brought him a broader understanding of foreign policy beyond just security concerns. Tuncer summarized Demirel's view on the new order, emphasizing his shift towards neo-liberal policies based on the importance of integrating into world markets rather than focusing solely on infrastructure investment.<sup>371</sup> In the post-Cold War era, Demirel recognized new opportunities beyond "the strict US domination" and Soviet threat, advocating for a more active foreign policy stance that can be interpreted as an effort not to fall behind his primary opponent, Özal. Still, Demirel continued to be more cautious and get closer to the bureaucracy's position. As President, his role in politics changed significantly as he mediated between different decision-making units in both domestic and foreign policy. Aydın Şihmantepe noted that Demirel participated more actively in foreign policy crises, especially when Prime Ministers failed to handle imminent threats and required swift decision-making.<sup>372</sup> Demirel clearly articulated this view, stating that

Multidimensional foreign policy cannot be a policy of being flirtatious with everyone. The Pacta sunt servanda principle should be the primary determinant of multidimensional policy. If you are part of an agreement, you should obey its own rules and can enjoy relations with others in spheres that are outside the domain of those rules. Otherwise, no one trusts you, and you cannot explain yourself, and you become alone".<sup>373</sup>

Despite carefully handling foreign policy, Demirel sometimes prioritized domestic concerns, as seen in his reluctance to apply for European Economic Community membership due to coalition politics. As both Prime Minister and President, his active stance in foreign policy during the post-Cold War era reflected his belief that the conditions were suitable for an active foreign policy. A clear example was his popular discourse "Turkish World from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall," in which he saw the Central Asian Turkic States within cultural and economic perspectives under the consideration of alternative energy resources were carefully balanced with his cautious position to refrain from suffering Russia Federation's whims.<sup>374</sup> Robins notes that a foreign advisor to Demirel indicated his interest in Central Asia stemmed from a desire to garner domestic political support due to high public interest in the Central Asian Turkic States and the lack of pre-existing political priorities for the region from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>375</sup> Conversely, Zeybek contends that Demirel's focus on Central Asia was not driven by domestic political calculations but by a rational and

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<sup>371</sup> Tuncer, N. (2007). Süleyman Demirel. In A. F. Demir (Ed.), *Türk dış politikasında liderler: Süreklilik ve değişim, söylem ve eylem* (1. basım, pp. 125–234). Bağlam Yayıncılık.

<sup>372</sup> Şihmantepe, A. (2019). *Türk dış politikasında bir lider Süleyman Demirel: Dış politika kriz davranışları üzerine bir araştırma* (Birinci baskı). Cinius Yayınları, 170.

<sup>373</sup> I dem, 169.

<sup>374</sup> Kılıçoğlu, 2016, 229.

<sup>375</sup> Robins, 2003, 69.

ideological interest, unlike Özal's approach, which was purely rational and interest-driven.<sup>376</sup> Similarly, Yavuzalp emphasizes that aside from his decision not to apply for European Community membership, Demirel maintained a clear distinction between domestic and foreign politics to ensure the proper functioning of state affairs in international relations.<sup>377</sup> Yet, in practice, Demirel made more frequent use of terms like "peaceful foreign policy," "multilateral and multidimensional foreign policy," and "continuity in foreign policy" to describe his approach. He believed in "a cautious policy that awaited the perfect opportunity, emphasizing non-belligerence and the principle of respecting legal boundaries."<sup>378</sup> All of this is supported by the fact that the TFP behavior analyzed in the previous sections was still and conditioned mainly by the institutional setting (with the military in the upper front) and cleavages among Turkish rulers about national role conception for Turkey after the Cold War, leaving increasingly less room for politicians (differently from the early Özal period) to play a significant role in shaping the country's external orientation.

#### 4.3.2. Tansu Çiller

According to Cizre, after she became Prime Minister, Çiller's political discourse emphasized conservative populism, Turgut Özal-style commitment to economic liberalism, and close cooperation with the armed forces to win a military victory in the Kurdish conflict.<sup>379</sup> These characteristics represented a stark contrast to the discourse of her predecessor, Süleyman Demirel, who, before the 1991 elections, had emphasized social welfare, civilianization, and democratization, particularly emphasizing human rights.

As evidenced earlier, Tansu Çiller's tenure as Prime Minister shaped Turkey's foreign policy during tumultuous times. Her personality has emerged throughout her tenure. According to Kesgin, her reactions and policies during critical events can be interpreted through her leadership traits and style, which exhibited three distinct features: low self-confidence, high distrust of others, and high in-group bias.<sup>380</sup> These traits significantly impacted her choices and actions in foreign affairs, leading her to focus on eliminating potential threats and problems. For instance, Çiller's low self-confidence (the weakest among Turkey's Prime Ministers in the post-Cold War era) might have stemmed from

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<sup>376</sup> Interview quoted in Kürkçü, 2019, 86.

<sup>377</sup> See Yavuzalp 1996, 123.

<sup>378</sup> See the conclusion of Kürkçü, 2019. See also Çuhadar, Ç. et al., 2021.

<sup>379</sup> See Sakallioğlu, 1996.

<sup>380</sup> Kesgin, 2013, 129.

the domestic political environment, characterized by military influence and economic and political instability.<sup>381</sup> This trait was evident in her deference to the military during her tenure as Prime Minister, where she “lavishly praised” the army and never challenged its role in politics. This might be traced back to her biography, too. Çiller was born in Istanbul as the daughter of a bureaucrat. She claims she was politicized early, wanting to put the economy right when she grew up. Her family sent her to Arnavutköy Girls’ College, a private American high school where well-to-do Istanbul families sent their children. There, she concealed her family’s modest financial and social status, which must have made Çiller believe in wealth’s “overriding” importance as a source of power and social status.<sup>382</sup> Çiller was a technocrat and was the Minister of State responsible for the economy from 1991 to 1993. This is said to significantly influence the formation of Çiller’s essential qualities, making her favorable view of American society and economy. When she first emerged on the political stage in Turkey, there were speculations that her pro-Americanism helped her win the sympathy and support of the U.S. government.<sup>383</sup> Upon Demirel’s election to the Presidency, she assumed the post of party chairperson in the DYP (center-right) in June 1993. Shortly after, she became the Prime Minister when her party and the SHP (center-left) agreed to keep the coalition government in office. Throughout the 1990s, she served as Deputy Prime Minister and MFA. However, her reputation eroded due to various scandals and electoral defeats, leading to her retirement from politics after the November 2002 elections.<sup>384</sup>

For some, Çiller’s leadership style included a blend of traditionally masculine attributes and strategic use of her gender for political advantage. She portrayed herself with “courage, endurance, determination, and militarism,” yet she also leveraged traditional female roles like “Mother” and “Sister.”<sup>385</sup> For others,<sup>386</sup> her tenure in office was more guided by pure motivations of power, egoistic interests, clientelism, and political intrigues. Colleagues and aides described her as authoritarian, lacking self-confidence, and not a good team player. For instance, Mehmet Dülger, then a prominent member of Çiller’s DYP, noted that she always had difficulty selecting the right team and getting along with team members.<sup>387</sup> According to her former press secretary, Çiller “doesn’t handle people

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<sup>381</sup> Idem.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 72-74. She studied at English-language schools. She earned a degree in economics from Robert College (present-day Bosphorus University). She completed her doctoral studies at the University of Connecticut in the US before returning to Turkey in 1974, where she taught at Bosphorus University’s Department of Economics until she became actively involved in politics.

<sup>383</sup> Yavuz, T. (1999). *İkinci vatan: Tansu Çiller’in ABD macerası* (1. baskı). Ümit Yayıncılık, 71.

<sup>384</sup> For a complete biography see Kesgin, 2013, but also Cizre, 2002.

<sup>385</sup> One must note that these perceptions of women in leadership positions may very well reflect gender stereotyping. A critical exception can be Arat, Y. (1998). A Woman Prime Minister in Turkey: Did It Matter? *Women & Politics*, 19(4), 1–22. Arat focuses on gender and politics; Cizre (2002) approaches to Çiller’s leadership in general and given the theme of the Heper and Sayarı volume on leadership and democracy.

<sup>386</sup> Idem.

<sup>387</sup> Cizre, 2002, 206.

very well. She is not friendly or open. It resulted from both inexperience and insensitivity”<sup>388</sup>. Several factors shaped her tenure in Turkish politics and her stronghold on the DYP. She maintained control over the party through strong leader-centric practices and a poorly institutionalized party structure. Çiller monitored patronage-based intraparty networks closely and personally dictated candidate selections, leading to opposition from those excluded. However, most party members, focused on their political careers, aligned with her to stay in favor. Additionally, intraparty opposition was weak due to the lack of precise demands, unifying purpose, and effective leadership among the disaffected members. Even attempts to oust her, such as at the November 1999 National Congress, failed due to the opposition's fragmentation and internal conflicts. The general tradition of leader worship in Turkish political parties, extreme in the DYP, also bolstered Çiller's dominance.<sup>389</sup> The DYP old guard, avoiding public critiques to maintain their positions, became her close allies. Çiller used co-optation, divide-and-rule, and expulsion strategies to consolidate her power. She included critics in her minority government to neutralize opposition and co-opted faction members while excluding their leaders. She also expelled potential challengers and their supporters, ensuring her control over delegate selections and maintaining her leadership position.

Çiller's distrust of others and high in-group bias significantly influenced her cautious approach to foreign policy. While she saw Turkey as a central state with significant cultural and strategic importance, she also emphasized Turkey's need to be wary of its neighbors:

We are very proud of our democratic heritage. We have all the institutions of democracy, the Parliament, the free press, all the other institutions. We are proud of what we have set forth as an example for other Muslim countries, and it's a model, either the Iranian or the Turkish model; we have two models now.<sup>390</sup>

During the Kardak crisis with Greece in late 1995, Çiller's response showcased her desire for a strong stance. She quickly declared that the Greek flag on the Kardak islets would be removed, stating, “That flag will come down, and those soldiers will go back to Greece.”<sup>391</sup> Her discourse during this time reflected her aggressive approach: “We do not give away territory. We do not concede even an inch of territory or a pebble.”<sup>392</sup> Had Turkey followed Çiller's proposal for military action; it was likely

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<sup>388</sup> Molly McAnailly Burke, “Turkey's First Lady”, *Lear's*, Vol. 6 (October 1993), 34-36, quoted in Kesgin, 2013.

<sup>389</sup> Cizre, 2002.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 203. Notably, the military's role in the 1990s also increased due to political and economic instability. This, however, does not take away from the fact that Çiller did not object to the military's role in domestic (for instance, the PKK) or foreign (for example, relations with Israel) policy matters. Otherwise, this argument does not apply to Çiller's later fight with the military during the Refah-Yol coalition. Then, Çiller was the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of foreign affairs. The analysis here depends solely on Çiller the Prime Minister.

<sup>391</sup> Kesgin, 2012, 42.

<sup>392</sup> 32 Gün (Director). (1995). *Tansu Çiller-Mesut Yılmaz Tartışması* [Broadcast]. <https://youtu.be/VgNvXE8c7R8?si=a06kmOOXRzfRgX0z>

that Greece and Turkey would have been at war. Two weeks after the Mediterranean calmed down, Çiller signaled that Turkey's response would be firm if Greece retaliated again, declaring,

If they bring soldiers to Kardak and hoist a flag once again, the same thing will happen. We are saying: Do not create a de facto situation by opening up the place for settlement. We will not allow this. We would regard this as a genuine provocation and a cause for war.<sup>393</sup>

Similarly, in her approach to the PKK, Çiller displayed hawkish policies. It was reported that Çiller once proposed attacking possible PKK targets in Iran, a proposal overruled by then-President Demirel. Responding to questions about a Turkish cross-border operation against the PKK in northern Iraq, Çiller said,

The terrorists have settled down there and are to attack back to my country to kill innocent people. So we had to do something about it to stop it. We will withdraw in the shortest possible time and have already started doing that. But I have to specify that if that kind of thing happens again, we will have to do the same thing again.<sup>394</sup>

Her attitude to double-deal in many issues to seek domestic consensus and “save her post” was also evident in 1995. Mindful of her domestic failures on many matters, Çiller perceived the Custom Union agreement with the EU as the flagship achievement of her term in office and projected on it an image of “greater Turkey,” stretching from the Balkans to the Transcaucasia and acting as the locomotive for the Middle East.<sup>395</sup>

This was also linked to her “compliance” with the military. In her interactions, Çiller completely abandoned efforts to reassert civilian control and instead lavishly praised the armed forces. She was careful not to provoke the military by disrupting the status quo, aiming to achieve a political win on the Kurdish issue through a decisive defeat of the PKK. When it came time to appoint a new chief of the general staff in 1994 and 1995, Çiller took no steps that might displease the High Command and adhered to the military's preferences. Doğan Güreş, whom she selected as the Chief of the General Staff and who was later elected to Parliament as a DYP deputy in 1995, recalled the close relationship between Çiller and the military command: “The Prime Minister acted like a tiger, and the Armed Forces liked it. I worked comfortably with several Prime Ministers – Özal, Akbulut, Yılmaz, and Demirel. But with Çiller, I worked with even greater ease.”<sup>396</sup> Due to Çiller's policies, the issue of developing a political solution to the Kurdish question received minimal official attention, and the balance in civil-military relations shifted further in favor of the military.

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<sup>393</sup> Arat, 1998, p. 11-12, 16. Arat also observes that Çiller “justified” her militarism, or more specifically her hawkish policies on the Kurdish problem, with reference to being a mother.

<sup>394</sup> Hale, 2012, 314. Also, on Çiller's “dirty fight against the PKK,” see Cizre, 2002, 205.

<sup>395</sup> Cizre, 2002, 203.

<sup>396</sup> Interview with Doğan Güreş. Kışlah, A. (1995, November 27). Güreş: Ordu Darbe Yapmaz. *Istanbul Daily*.

Her complicated relations with the military were also evident during her coalition government with Erbakan's RP. On February 28, 1997, the military-dominated MGK presented the DYP-RP coalition with a list of measures to curb Islamic activities. The government's failure or refusal to implement these measures led to its collapse in June. Although Çiller continued to play a significant role in parliamentary politics after the government's resignation, the MGK's actions in February 1997 profoundly impacted Turkey's political landscape. According to Cizre, Çiller experienced defeat, decline, and humiliation, losing her ability to inspire her countrymen with new hopes and visions, ultimately becoming part of the "failed" generation of politicians.<sup>397</sup>

One leading cause is that the RP and DYP coalition was driven by pragmatic concerns for both parties and their leaders. Çiller sought the RP's support to fend off corruption inquiries against her. At the same time, Erbakan aimed to leverage government patronage to reward his supporters and bolster the RP's credibility as a party trusted by "the establishment." However, this coalition proved disastrous for Çiller's political career. The arrangement between the parties was based on an evil agreement: the RP promised not to pursue investigations into Çiller's finances and political activities in exchange for joining the government. This alliance with an Islamist party, disliked by Turkey's secular establishment, severely damaged the secular, Western, and modern image that Çiller and the DYP had cultivated since 1991. The secular media launched a massive attack on her wealth, family, character, leadership style, and political dealings, which significantly eroded her political popularity. Although Çiller attempted to act as a check on Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to prevent him from violating Turkey's secular traditions, Erbakan's controversial actions, such as official visits to Libya and Iran, made her task extremely challenging.

Finally, another characteristic of their mandates was her tendency to make an excessive number of promises she could not keep and statements she could not back up. This backlashed when she grew insecure amid increasing pressures on the RP-DYP coalition. For instance, she claimed the military supported her primarily because the US was behind her and that the real target of the military was not her but the RP. While trying to get the Prime Minister from Erbakan, she also sought active support from the military. However, the commanders told her she needed to seek the support of Parliament, as they had already decided not to engage with a complex coalition. A senior officer explained their refusal to communicate with her, highlighting how her public statements had become so misleading that they avoided contact to prevent being misrepresented: "The reason we don't answer her phone calls is that she may put us in a difficult situation by distorting what we told her."<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Cizre, 2002, 203.

<sup>398</sup> Ergin, S. (1997, August 30). 90 Sıcak Günün Hikayesi, Fırtına Dosyası. *Hürriyet*.  
<https://satis.hurriyet.com.tr/DateSelect.aspx?catid=1&pid=1>.

As Kesgin notes, Çiller was an opportunistic leader who focused on assessing what is possible in light of one's goals and considering what important constituencies allowed.<sup>399</sup> However, excessive reliance and ambitions led her to moves such as an uncomfortable partnership with the RP that prompted many secularists, especially the military, to view Çiller as having facilitated the transfer of political power to anti-secular forces. Çiller's reputation as a "survivor" is generally linked with the Machiavellian personal traits she is claimed to possess. These traits were mentioned by Meral Akşener, Çiller's closest colleague and aide/confidante at one time: "We have problems with (her) leadership. The only adjectives we may use to describe our leader are 'liar,' 'unfaithful,' and 'unreliable.'"<sup>400</sup> Similarly, a disciple of the Nakşibendi religious brotherhood said, "It is not important if...[Çiller] is sincere or not. It seems she will [...] serve the interests of the Islamic community despite being a non-believer."<sup>401</sup> This underscored how, unlike other politicians of the time, her political and ideological position was more directed at securing her power. Indeed, during her political career, Çiller's orientation shifted from the center to the right, emphasizing themes of Turkish nationalism, culture, and religion. She blended xenophobic elements of patriotism, such as the concepts of "flag," "blood," and "sacrifice for the state," with religious aspects like the ezan (call to prayer), Allah (God), and "being a Muslim."<sup>402</sup> In her own words, she described this shift by stating,

We are discovering the Turkish flag. There is something new in this. It would be more correct to call this Turkey's nationalism. It is not sufficient to look at this only from the perspective of nationalism. There is also the dimension of ezan... I want a Turkish that is both secular and Muslim.<sup>403</sup>

Regarding the economy, Çiller initially adopted a rhetoric focused on downsizing the state. She aimed to demystify the state's role by emphasizing that "the state's money is, in fact, the people's money."<sup>404</sup> She criticized the inefficiency of the populist state and assured people with low incomes that social improvements would come from tax reform and privatization. In reality, however, her opposition to the over-intervention of the state in the economy and her pro-market stance were negated by her populist policies. This oscillation can be understood by looking into the Turkish sociopolitical milieu of the 1990s. While liberal democracy and individual responsibility for wealth creation gained traction in Turkey, many citizens still viewed the state as having an almost metaphysical essence. On

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<sup>399</sup> Kesgin, 2012. 44.

<sup>400</sup> İşleyen, E. (1999, July 28). Akşener: Çiller Yalancı. *Milliyet*. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/aksener-ciller-yalanci-guvenilmez-5243247>.

<sup>401</sup> Çakır, R. (1999, January 14). DYP'nin Mayası. *Milliyet*. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/taha-akyol/dyp-nereye-5259460>.

<sup>402</sup> See the series of videos of Çiller's speeches from 32.Gün's archive: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZ6UAZ-GySw>.

<sup>403</sup> See Özkök, E. (1994, October 31). Çiller: Türkiye Milliyetçiliği Doğdu. *Hürriyet*.

<sup>404</sup> TBMM. (1993). *Başbakan Tansu Çiller'in Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi DYP Grup Konuşmaları—22 Haziran-2 Kasım 1993*, 99-110 [https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/td\\_v2\\_istatistik.tutanak\\_hazirla?v\\_meclis=1&v\\_donem=21&v\\_yasama\\_yili=&v\\_cilt=&v\\_birlesim=&v\\_sayfa=&v\\_anabaslik=&v\\_altbaslik=&v\\_mv=TANSU%20%C7%DDLLER&v\\_sb=&v\\_ozet=&v\\_kelime=&v\\_bastarih=&v\\_bittarih=](https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/td_v2_istatistik.tutanak_hazirla?v_meclis=1&v_donem=21&v_yasama_yili=&v_cilt=&v_birlesim=&v_sayfa=&v_anabaslik=&v_altbaslik=&v_mv=TANSU%20%C7%DDLLER&v_sb=&v_ozet=&v_kelime=&v_bastarih=&v_bittarih=).

one side, there was considerable enthusiasm for integrating with the global information society and democracy. Conversely, a powerful coalition of business interests supported a statist economy. Democratic ideals coexisted with political chaos and a call for authoritarianism to protect the polity from the upheavals caused by “opening up,” “changing,” and “globalizing.” The decline in ideological roles of political parties and changes in their social bases created an environment where Çiller could employ unprecedented strategies to consolidate her power and intimidate critics. The paradoxical situation demanded change and continuity, which allowed her to oscillate between opposing positions. She could advocate for globalization and democracy within a heavily nationalistic, religious, and state-centric discourse. Çiller was committed to Turkey’s accession to the European Union while defying European norms and standards to protect nationalistic and religious values. To conclude, if one has to address her impact on future Turkish politics, Cizre offers that

neither Çiller’s greatest political moments nor her ultimate fall was due to a deep-seated belief or conviction in democracy or a comprehensive worldview. On the contrary, almost everything she achieved or failed to do had to do with idea-defying and opportunity-seeking day-to-day considerations. Her government was not notable for introducing new ideas and implementing them. Nor was it renowned for its concerns for democracy.<sup>405</sup>

#### **4.3.3. Necmettin Erbakan**

The political figure of Necmettin Erbakan played a significant role throughout many historical conjunctures of Turkish politics. Necmettin Erbakan began his political career in 1969 when he was elected deputy of Konya in the Turkish Parliament, later founding the first NO party, the MNP (Milli Nizam Partisi, National Order Party). He took part several times in coalition governments, and with the electoral rise of his RP in the first half of the 1990s, he became Turkey’s Prime Minister in 1996. In foreign policy, he is remembered, among other things, for his role as Deputy PM during the 1974 Turkish intervention in Cyprus and for creating the D-8 (Developing 8) international organization for development cooperation among its eight Muslim member states. Yet, it is essential to “place Erbakan into context” to understand the elements behind his vision better.

Born in 1926, Erbakan did not have a pious education, or to say it better, Erbakan could not have a religious education because it was not allowed at the time. This forged his early professional career as a mechanical engineer whose academic path flourished in Turkey and Germany.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Cizre, 2003, p. 213.

<sup>406</sup> He founded a motor factory in Istanbul and made contacts in the business community and in industry, which helped him gain the Presidency of the Union of the Chambers of Commerce and Stock Exchange in 1969



Nonetheless, in his private life, he was a very devout Muslim with close ties to the Nakşibendi religious brotherhood of the Sufi Order that, under the influence of Mehmet Zahit Kotku, helped him develop a powerful emotional attachment to Islam and then played a crucial role in shaping his political and ideological outlook. According to Özdalga, at least in part because the public practice of Islam was suppressed, his religiosity became a focus on moral qualities and moral development for the country.<sup>407</sup> Similarly, Sasley underlines that

He believed that the moral core of society came from Islam: this made Turkey great in the past and what would make it great again in the future. This had the cumulative effect of constructing cognitive structures based on affective judgments and, thus, policy inflexibility.<sup>408</sup>

In this sense, Erbakan's political actions directly manifested his profound religious beliefs. As the founder of the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) movement, he embodied the aspiration to make Islam the foundational framework for Turkish politics, society, and economy. When he established the first Islamist political party, the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*, MNP), in 1970, he did so with the support of the religious Nakşibendi and Nurcu orders. After the MNP was shut down in<sup>409</sup>, Erbakan went into self-imposed exile, a period his supporters likened to the "hegira," referencing the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina. Throughout his political career, whenever internal conflicts arose within Islamist political parties between traditional-conservative and moderate-progressive factions, Erbakan consistently aligned himself with the former, reflecting his inclinations.<sup>410</sup>

One point that is relevant to recall is that for most Turkish Islamists close to the *Milli Görüş* movement, their ideological commitment to the transnational Islamic community often took precedence over their national allegiance to Turkey.<sup>411</sup> This perspective celebrated Turkey's potential leading role, primarily attributed to its Ottoman legacy. Conversely, the Kemalist initiative to sever ties with the Muslim world in favor of a Western orientation was perceived by Islamists as a fundamental assault on the true identity of Turks, who saw themselves as integral members of the *Umma* (the community of Muslim believers), the pioneers of the Muslim world, and heirs to the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, foreign policy became a crucial symbol of the ideological rift

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<sup>407</sup> Özdalga, E. (2002). Necmettin Erbakan: Democracy for the Sake of Power. In M. Heper & S. Sayarı (Eds.), *Political leaders and democracy in Turkey*. Lexington Books.

<sup>408</sup> Sasley, B. E. (2012). Turkish Leaders and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Lobbying for European Union Membership. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 48(4), 556.

<sup>409</sup> In support of the dissolution of the party, prosecutors cited a speech made by Erbakan in October 1970, in which he said, "*We underline the fact that it is more important to study the Traditions of the Prophet and the works of Imam Ghazali and Imam Rabbani than learning the sociology and ethics now taught in schools. For the believers...should join the National Order by pronouncing the Islamic formula...[In the Name of God].*" Özdalga, 2002, 11.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>411</sup> Calabrò, A. (2017). Islamist Views on Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 19(1), 158.

between Kemalists and Islamists in Turkey,<sup>412</sup> frequently manifesting as institutional tensions.<sup>413</sup> The notion of the *Umma*'s transnational integrity, a core tenet of political Islam's approach to international relations, whether it envisioned a unified Islamic state or enhanced cooperation among Muslim nations, has historically been a foundation for spreading pan-Islamist ideals.<sup>414</sup> Islamist authors in Turkey have crafted a distinct narrative positioning Turkey as the natural leader of the Muslim *Umma*, often without acknowledging any existing state-led initiatives.

Scholars like Menderes Çınar and Burhanettin Duran argue that Turkish political Islam has never entirely divorced itself from nationalism.<sup>415</sup> This intertwining is evident in the evolution of Cold War Pan-Islamism into what is now described as "neo-Pan-Islamism."<sup>416</sup> While maintaining the critical element of Muslim solidarity and unity, despite Western-imposed state borders and linguistic or ethnic differences, the focus shifted from seeking liberation from colonialism or maintaining the Caliphate to fostering an alliance of independent Muslim states. This alliance aimed to form a homogeneous bloc opposing Western capitalism and communism. During this phase, anti-communism and anti-Zionism emerged in Turkey as significant components of the envisioned Muslim union and its corresponding foreign policy of Islamist conservative circles.

This helps to understand Erdogan's frequent references to policies grounded in Islamic principles that aimed to connect with Turkish society's poorer or more peripheral segments. Conversely, his harsh critique of "imitators" expresses his disdain for the Westernized elites, whom he accuses of unthinkingly pursuing Europeanization. Consequently, Erdogan argues that these elite representatives are disconnected from the Turkish populace, leading to ineffective foreign policy. In his 1975 book "*Milli Görüş*," Erdogan discusses foreign policy by alluding to a fundamental incompatibility rooted in values of "justice" (*hak and adl*), which he believed were intrinsic to Turkey's historical character and honor. His continuous reference to the practical and economic benefits of integrating "national," "spiritual, and moral" values into policies distinguished him from purely religious figures. This reflected a dualistic approach in his discourse: he categorized policies as either being in harmony with the people's inherent nature or opposing it. Within this framework, he frequently criticized "imitators" (*taklitçiler*) – politicians and intellectuals who guide Turkey towards foreign, alien ideologies. Erdogan creates a clear division between good and evil, Islamic and Western civilizations, or "we" versus "they," which helps position groups in contrast.

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<sup>412</sup> Robins, 2003, 145.

<sup>413</sup> Rubin & Kirişçi, 2001, 104-105.

<sup>414</sup> Karabell, Z. (1996). Fundamental Misconceptions: Islamic Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy*, 105(105), 77–90.

<sup>415</sup> Cizre, Ü., Çınar, M., & Burhanettin, D. (Eds.). (2008). The specific evolution of contemporary Political Islam in Turkey and its 'difference.' In *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey*. Routledge, 23.

<sup>416</sup> Calabrò, 2017, 161.

At the same time, Erbakan also founded his political discourse on the concepts of “national vision,” combining Islamist and nationalist values. This meant championing economic development based on its financial and social values while refusing Westernism.<sup>417</sup> An early indication of Erbakan’s views on foreign policy can be found in his book of 1971, “Turkey and the Common Market” (*Türkiye ve Ortak Pazar*), which consists of two Parliamentary speeches given by Erbakan in 1970 on the topic of relations between Turkey and the European Economic Community. This “Islamic Common Market” would be based on “historical and cultural ties.”<sup>418</sup> It is within the framework of the MSP, founded in 1972, that Erbakan’s vision of an “Islamic Union” (*İslam Birliği*) takes a more definite shape, including projects establishing pan-Islamic international organizations.<sup>419</sup> Throughout the electoral campaign of 1977, Erbakan frequently expressed his idea of Turkey as a “Leader Country” in the Muslim world.

In his view, the sum of these concepts, consisting of the Islamic values constituting the core of Turkish identity, should also be the basis of a foreign policy “with a (strong) personality” (*şahsiyetli*).<sup>420</sup> Accordingly, if Turkey followed its national values and character, it would quickly obtain economic development and independence. For him the country’s foreign policy, should “follow our values, leaving aside the alien ideas of imitators that want to maintain Turkey’s dependence on Western interests.”<sup>421</sup>

As already seen, Erbakan’s foreign policy reflected his preference for Islam over the West, which he viewed as contributing to Turkey’s decline. He once described the EU as a hierarchy with Zionist capitalists at the top, Europeans in the middle serving the Zionists, and the lower level reserved for subordinates like Turkey.<sup>422</sup> Under his leadership, the RP took an anti-western solid stance. While Erbakan assured that Turkey would maintain strong relations with Europe, he emphasized strengthening ties with the Islamic world. The party publicly declared that “the weakness and backwardness of the Islamic society is not due to Islam but to Western domination of Muslims,”<sup>423</sup> which caused the “degeneration of morals in society” and that “if society lived according to Islamist principles, things would get better.”<sup>424</sup> He envisioned a new Islamic world

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<sup>417</sup> Özdalga, E. (2009). Islamism and Nationalism as Sister Ideologies: Reflections on the Politicization of Islam in a *Longue Durée* Perspective. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(3), 407–423.

<sup>418</sup> Erbakan, N. (1971). *Türkiye ve Ortak Pazar*. Furkan Yayınları, 39.

<sup>419</sup> Bakır, B. (2007). Necmettin Erbakan. In A. F. Demir (Ed.), *Türk dış politikasında liderler: Süreklilik ve değişim, söylem ve eylem* (1. basım). Bağlam Yayıncılık, 365–366.

<sup>420</sup> Erbakan, 1991, 82–84.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>422</sup> Ahmad, F. (with Royal Institute of International Affairs). (1977). *The Turkish experiment in democracy: 1950–1975*. Inst. of Internat. Affairs; Robins, 2003.

<sup>423</sup> Ayata, S. (1996). Patronage, Party, and State: The Politicization of Islam in Turkey. *Middle East Journal*, 50(1), 40–56.

<sup>424</sup> Turan, I. (1991). Religion and Political Culture in Turkey. In R. Tapper (Ed.), *Islam in modern Turkey: Religion, politics, and literature in a secular state*. I.B. Tauris ; Distributed by St Martin’s Press.

order with institutions like the Islamic United Nations and an Islamic NATO. Erbakan also showed an affinity for radical Islamic regimes and organizations, as evidenced by his comments to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak about reconciling with the Muslim Brotherhood. However, as Robin notes, Erbakan's strategies had a pragmatic side, as he did not use foreign policies to attack or undermine Europe. Instead, despite evidence of the growing importance of Europe for Turkish economic activity, particularly trade, he chose to neglect it and direct his priorities and efforts toward the Islamic world – the diametrically opposite manifestation of a Western orientation that he had long disparaged.<sup>425</sup>

There is, therefore, no doubt that Erbakan's strong belief in Islamism led him to a political career marked by continuous efforts, in the face of successive closures by the armed forces, to form a political party that would represent the Islamist agenda, work to bring it to fruition, and in so doing restructure Turkey along what he was convinced was the most appropriate lifestyle. However, as Sasley notes, each time a newer version of this attempt was manifested, it had a slightly different emphasis in political terms. Still, it never removed its core belief that Islamism should be the guiding framework for Turkey."<sup>426</sup> The parties all had the same leaders, publications, ideologies, policy recommendations, and many of the same support groups nationwide. Erbakan's ideological dualism was deeply reflected in his long political career.

One example came already in October 1972. While Erbakan was in Switzerland avoiding trial, his supporters established the MSP. Fearing the military and recalling the fate of the MNP, the MSP downplayed its Islamic emphasis, instead advocating for rapid industrialization, social and economic justice, and equitable wealth distribution, all underpinned by strong moral values and a focus on family life. Despite these ostensibly secular elements, the MSP's program was fundamentally a veiled effort to reintegrate Islam into the state and society.<sup>427</sup> Seemingly, the success of RF, while promoting the "Just Order" (*Adil Düzen*) policy platform, retained much of the MSP's ideology and elements, advocating for economic justice, social reforms, pensions, healthcare, employment, and housing, and distinguishing between detrimental Westernization and beneficial modernization, all framed in Islamic concepts. Following the closure of the RP in the wake of the 28 February process, Erbakan established the FP in December 1997. Essentially, the FP was the RP under a different name, retaining most of the RP's Parliamentary seats. Erbakan carefully avoided rhetoric that might provoke the military and adopted more moderate positions on issues like the female headscarves promoting free-market policies, which were seen as tactical shifts to avoid the fate of the RP. Yet, episodes like the

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<sup>425</sup> See Robins, 2003, 149.

<sup>426</sup> Sasley, 2012, 556.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 557.

incident involving the FP member Merve Kavakçı, who was expelled from the Grand National Assembly for wearing a headscarf, illustrated the fragility of Erbakan's attempts at political equilibrium.<sup>428</sup>

The final manifestation of Erbakan's Islamist parties is the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP). After the Constitutional Court dissolved Fazilet in June 2001, its former deputies formed two new parties: the traditionalists (*gelenekçi*) established the SP, while the moderates (*yenilikçi*) founded the AKP. Accordingly, as seen in the next chapter, Erbakan is one of those Islamist figures that stand "as bridges from early Pan-Islamist tradition to today's civilizational discourse in the AK Party's foreign policy."<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> On the issue and this evaluation see White, J. B. (2005). *Islamist mobilization in Turkey: A study in vernacular politics* (Nachdr). Univ. of Washington Press.

<sup>429</sup> Ardiç, N. (2014). Civilizational Discourse, the 'Alliance of Civilizations' and Turkish Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 16(3), 101–122.

## 5. Summary of PART 2

The two chapters of PART 2 offer a detailed examination of TFP during two crucial watershed periods: the transformative leadership of Turgut Özal in the 1980s and the subsequent era of coalition governments in the 1990s. Together, these eras highlight the significant changes and continuities in how Turkey tried to shape and revise its role on the global stage, shifting from the assertive and visionary foreign policy of Özal to the more fragmented and reactive strategies of the coalition years. While domestic and external factors shaped both periods, the individual level – the role of leadership in shaping foreign policy – also emerges as a central stage of the “political game,” particularly when comparing the centralized, charismatic leadership of Özal with the more divided and politically constrained coalition governments that followed.

Turgut Özal’s tenure as Prime Minister and later as President epitomized a clear shift in TFP. He fundamentally reoriented the country’s approach from a traditionally security-driven and Western-aligned strategy to one focused on economic liberalization, regional engagement, and multilateralism. Under Özal, economic diplomacy became the cornerstone of TFP, reflecting his profound belief that economic growth and integration into the global economy were central to Turkey’s strategic ambitions. Özal’s policies prioritized engagement with the Middle East, where Turkey’s exports and business interests grew significantly, in line with a broader strategy to reduce Turkey’s dependence on Western powers and carve out a more independent foreign policy path. He believed that Turkey’s economic liberalization and modernization would secure its place as a regional power, and his emphasis on privatization, deregulation, and fostering ties with international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank were central to his vision of Turkey as an emerging economic force. However, this did not imply detaching from the West. Rather, Özal introduced a multidimensional approach to foreign policy, engaging not only with the West but also with the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the newly independent Turkic states that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He envisioned Turkey as a bridge between East and West, leveraging its unique geographic and cultural position to play a more active role in international affairs. This approach marked a significant departure from the Cold War’s traditional security-oriented policies, which prioritized military alliances and ideological commitments. Özal’s pragmatic foreign policy was most evident in Turkey’s improved relations with key regional actors such as Iraq, Iran, and Israel. His tenure was also characterized by “neo-Ottomanist undertones” that emphasized Turkey’s historical and cultural ties to the Middle East and Central Asia. This feature represented a significant change from the Kemalist foreign policy tradition, which had largely disengaged from the Ottoman legacy. This new orientation expanded Turkey’s influence in the Islamic world, while Özal carefully maintained strong

relations with the West, ensuring that Turkey's Western alliances remained intact. Institutionally, Özal centralized foreign policy decision-making, often bypassing traditional institutions like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He relied heavily on business elites and personal diplomacy to shape Turkey's foreign relations, reflecting his belief in strong executive control. This period also saw a decline in the military's influence over foreign policy as Özal's civilian authority and economic agenda increasingly dominated. His leadership weakened the traditional Kemalist establishment, laying the foundation for a more assertive and independent Turkish foreign policy.

However, the period following Özal's Presidency, dominated by coalition governments, presented a stark contrast to the previous decade. Unlike Özal's strong and centralized leadership, coalition governments were characterized by political fragmentation and instability, which hindered their ability to pursue a consistent foreign policy. The ideological diversity within these coalitions led to disjointed decision-making, as multiple parties with divergent agendas vied for influence. As a result, Turkish foreign policy during this period became more reactive and less proactive, as coalition governments often found themselves responding to regional crises rather than shaping them. With the decline of Özal's economy-first strategy, the coalition governments shifted back towards a security-oriented foreign policy. The rise of PKK terrorism, the Kurdish question, and the instability in Iraq after the Gulf War reoriented Turkish foreign policy towards military and defense concerns. The military regained influence over foreign policy during this period, particularly in relation to NATO and Turkey's strained relations with the European Union. The coalition governments also struggled to maintain Turkey's economic growth, and the economic difficulties of the 1990s, including a financial crisis in 2001, constrained their ability to pursue ambitious foreign policy goals. Turkey's relations with the EU deteriorated during this period, largely due to criticisms from the EU regarding Turkey's human rights record, its handling of the Kurdish conflict, and its democratic deficits. The promise of EU membership, which Özal had pursued enthusiastically, remained unfulfilled, leading to growing frustration within Turkey's political establishment. Meanwhile, the brief tenure of Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist-led government marked a period of tension between Turkey's Western alliances and its attempts to strengthen ties with Islamic countries. Erbakan's efforts to pursue a more Islamist foreign policy were short-lived, as the military intervened through the "post-modern coup" of 1997, forcing Erbakan to resign and recalibrating Turkey's foreign policy back towards the West. In terms of economic policy, the coalition governments struggled with internal instability, which limited Turkey's diplomatic reach. Unlike Özal, who had used economic growth as a tool of foreign policy, the coalitions were often preoccupied with managing internal economic crises, which left little room for expanding Turkey's international influence. Consequently, TFP during this period was

largely defensive and reactive, focusing on addressing security threats and maintaining the status quo rather than pursuing bold diplomatic initiatives.

When comparing these two periods, the contrast between Özal's visionary leadership and the fragmented nature of the coalition governments is evident. Özal's tenure was characterized by a clear foreign policy agenda focused on economic modernization, regional engagement, and multilateral diplomacy. In contrast, the coalition governments lacked the cohesive leadership necessary for a unified foreign policy, resulting in fragmented and often conflicting strategies. The economic liberalization that had driven Özal's foreign policy led to a return to traditional security concerns, as internal instability and regional crises dominated the coalition years. Özal's legacy, however, persisted beyond his tenure. His efforts to position Turkey as a regional power with influence in both the East and West continued to shape Turkish foreign policy, even as coalition governments struggled to maintain the momentum he had created. The individual level during Özal's leadership – his personal influence, vision, and centralization of power – was critical to Turkey's proactive and dynamic foreign policy. In contrast, the coalition governments, lacking a singular vision and grappling with internal divisions, were unable to sustain the same level of assertiveness and international engagement, which resulted in less coherent policies that reflected the divisions between and within each of the parties in power. Ultimately, the two chapters of PART 2 illustrate how power relations, political structures, and leadership profoundly shaped TFP during these two periods. Despite the 1990s being seen as a "lost decade" for TFP, as the next chapter will highlight, looking (further) back at the Özal era and the subsequent internal instability provides a more substantial explanation of the political earthquake and the fast-paced changes occurred in Turkey's external, internal, and individual level since the early 2000s.







## **PART 3: TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE IN THE AKP ERA**

### **6. THE RISE OF THE AKP and TFP's GOLDEN ERA**

The political earthquake that affected Turkey's domestic politics in the early 2000s led to drastic changes in the country's decision and policy-making structures and the emergence of unprecedented features, agents, and modalities in the Turkish sociopolitical realm. In this context, the rise of the AKP as the new dominant party not only represented a blow to all the precedent political formations but also set in motion a full-fledged restoration of institutional and power-share mechanisms that paralleled the advent of new ideational elements in Turkey's politics. At the same time, the external level witnessed seemingly dramatic reshuffles, with events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent US War on Terror that made the distinction between international and regional issues much more blurred. All of this prompted a wide, fast-paced, and – for some aspects – “uneasy to define variation” in Turkish Foreign Policy, which from 2002 onward deployed the most prolonged activism, confident attitude, and multidimensional approaches that the country had ever experienced throughout its history. In light of these considerations, this chapter analyzes how the alterations that concurrently occurred on the external, internal, and individual levels contributed to shaping the high expectations, self-confident behavior, and actual positive results of TFP until 2011-2012.

#### **6.1. The External Level**

##### **6.1.1. The 9/11 as a Critical Juncture**

A critical juncture is an event or iterated series of events that create constraints and opportunities for action, setting actors on new pathways, where “self-reinforcing processes make reversals very difficult.”<sup>1</sup> Notably, critical junctures, unlike “shocks,” are rare and punctuate periods of relative stasis where path dependence becomes embedded in actors' actions and choices. Critical junctures do not create stasis; instead, they alter existing parameters and establish new directions, resulting in some identifiable and more regular patterns, particularly regarding regional order and international

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<sup>1</sup> Pierson, 2004, 10. See also Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007.

alignments. Within this understanding that draws from Historical Institutionalism,<sup>2</sup> Louis Fawcett argues that the 9/11 Terrorist attacks (September 11, 2001) and the subsequent Iraq War (2003) have represented a critical juncture not only for the international order but also at the regional and state level.<sup>3</sup> This perspective emphasizes how the Iraq War and its consequences initiated significant changes that altered the trajectory of states and other actors, making a return to the previous status quo impossible. From this perspective, these events would gradually signal the decline of US unipolarity and the emergence of a more multipolar international system, along with other regional and institutional shifts. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the United States was urged to make radical changes in the security policy against this “asymmetric threat/war,” which implied that minor actors such as terrorist groups in the international system had the potential to erode great powers’ capabilities and objectives. For example, terrorism has been ranked first according to the new threat perceptions of the US. Also, it has been emphasized that countries that support terrorism will be called out as “evil axis.”<sup>4</sup> The national security strategy created for this purpose, the “Pre-emptive Strike Concept” or “Bush Doctrine,” which aimed to eliminate potential threats before they become active, was included in the country’s policies.<sup>5</sup> The Bush administration defined this new security strategy as “glorifying human dignity, securing the world against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.” It implemented it in Afghanistan to target Al-Qaeda.<sup>6</sup> As Akçay notes,

the 9/11 attacks caused the US to lose its advantage of military superiority, of which it was considered the leader of the world, to the economic field. The Cold War era was a period of stability, but a lack of security. In contrast, the ten years after the 9/11 attacks were one with no security and no stability. Even the US, a world superpower with the world’s most advanced intelligence facilities and nuclear weapons, was shown to be vulnerable. As a result, the Bush Administration’s perspective on terrorism changed after these terrorist incidents and directed its defense strategy toward the fight against global terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, one can see these developments also as ones that challenged the traditional definition of the “Middle East” as a defined concept. This does not suggest that the pre-2003 Middle East was stable – the region has frequently experienced crises and shocks – and does not imply that

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<sup>2</sup> While HI has been less used in IR than in other areas of political science, it works well in certain settings, for example, in looking at the end of the Cold War as a critical juncture for international order and institutions or the phenomenon of global terrorism as leading to revised security priorities. See Solingen, E., & Wan, W. (2016). Critical junctures, developmental pathways and incremental change in security institutions. In K. O. Fioretos, T. G. Falleti, & A. D. Sheingate (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism* (First edition). Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Fawcett, L. (2023). The Iraq War 20 years on: Towards a new regional architecture. *International Affairs*, 99(2), 573. see also Fawcett, L. (2013). The Iraq War ten years on: Assessing the fallout. *International Affairs*, 89(2), 325–343.

<sup>4</sup> Cox, M. (2002). Paradigm shifts and 9/11: International relations after Twin Towers. *Security Dialogue*, 33(2), 247–251.

<sup>5</sup> Ağır, B. S. (2006). The Bush Doctrine: A Search For Global Hegemonic Stability? *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations*, 3(12), 71-100; See also The White House. (2002). The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Thrall, T., & Goepner, E. (2017). Step Back: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy from the Failed War on Terror.

<sup>7</sup> Akçay, E. Y. (2021). The Butterfly Effect of the March 1 Memorandum: The Hood Event. In Ş. Ş. Erçetin, Ş. N. Açıkalin, & E. Vajzović (Eds.), *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2020* (pp. 239–250). Springer International Publishing, 241.

the post-Iraq War situation followed a linear or consistent pattern or that states, non-state actors, and institutions responded uniformly or simultaneously.<sup>8</sup> However,

The US decision to go to war and remake the Iraqi state and to refashion the Middle East was critical in facilitating new international alignments, changing perceptions of US power, and opening “the way to a new regional balance of power and institutions. The effects were greater because the Iraq War occurred at a time when US unipolarity was still at its height; the Middle East constituted one of the most important testing grounds of the ‘new world order’ articulated by President George W. Bush following the Gulf War of 1991, and the ‘Asia pivot’ was still a project in the making. But the protracted nature, cost and ultimate failure of that war to achieve its stated goals had a significant impact on US influence in the region and the wider world, lessening its diplomatic reputation.”<sup>9</sup>

In Joseph Nye’s words, it at once marked the end of the “unipolar moment,” the “fall of US hegemony,” and the failure of “democratic enlargement”.<sup>10</sup> This becomes more evident when considering that, from the early 1990s until 2008, the US, in collaboration with its European allies in NATO and the EU, dominated a global order dominated by the Liberal International Order (LIO). During this period, the order expanded to include former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, driven by the overwhelming material power of the US, which enabled it to pursue dominant strategies worldwide.<sup>11</sup> However, the US invasions of Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks reflected the excessive confidence of American leaders in spreading liberal democracy. Up until 2008, the rise of China was not a primary concern for American strategists, and the EU was at the height of its influence. The security strategies of the US and European states reflected a sense of optimism and confidence in the dominance of Western values. The national security strategies of the George W. Bush (2001-2009) and Obama (2009-2017) administrations and the EU’s first security strategy in 2003 did not even consider great power competition or ideological polarization as significant threats to the LIO. As Fawcett notes, many in the West seemed to be reassured by Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis, which suggested that liberal-capitalist democracy had become the uncontested global model.<sup>12</sup> However, the 9/11 attacks, the growing criticism of the US approach to the Global War on Terror, and especially the financial crisis of the late 2000s began to erode this optimism. The sense of decline started to take hold among Western elites as the resurgence of

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<sup>8</sup> Fawcett, 2023, 574

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 575.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr, ‘The rise and fall of American hegemony from Wilson to Trump’, *International Affairs* 95: 1, 2019, pp. 63–80.

<sup>11</sup> For some, this was defined as a “primacist” policy. See, among many, Brands, H. (2018). *Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era*. Texas National Security Review; Walt, S. M. (2002). American Primacy: Its Prospects and Pitfalls. *Naval War College Review*, 55(2), 9–28.

<sup>12</sup> Fukuyama, 1989.

Russia<sup>13</sup>, and the rise of China<sup>14</sup> challenged Western dominance, leading to increasing calls for integrating these rising non-Western powers into the structures of the LIO.

The impact of the Iraq War on US allies was multifaceted and significant. The conflict highlighted indigenous European divisions regarding a unified Middle East policy, weakening the potential for a cohesive Western response. Major EU countries like France and Germany opposed interventionist approaches, advocating for a UN-centered reliance, while the UK, Spain, and some Eastern European countries aligned with the US.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the Iraq War triggered geopolitical shifts, revealing a more pluralistic and competitive international arena for various other powers, as evident in the many changes that made the distinction between the international, regional, and interstate levels much more blurred. As Mikkel Rasmussen argued right after the events, “the attacks of 11 September 2001 arguably showed the globality of security in the late-modern world.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, while Americans traditionally could safely assume that wars took place beyond the horizon, Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defense at the time) told the Congress that

The recent attacks on Washington and New York demonstrate [that] we are witnessing a dramatic expansion of the deadly zone of conflict to our population centers. War used to be something that took place on foreign soil. No longer.<sup>17</sup>

What had changed, the Deputy Secretary of Defense argued, was the ability of “others” to project power vis-à-vis the United States. Therefore, if it is undeniable that the Middle East had long been a battleground for competing regional powers, “an uneasy equilibrium was somehow maintained mainly due to the influence of external forces, which kept ambitions like Egypt or Iraq’s in check.”<sup>18</sup> However, the US invasion of Iraq disrupted this balance by toppling the regime and failing to reconstruct the state, leading to significant shifts in the region’s power dynamics. Consequently, all regional actors, whether US allies or rivals, had to develop new strategies to address the instability caused by the weakening of Iraq, a key regional player. Before 2003, Iraq was a regional power state, particularly after Egypt’s isolation following the Camp David Accords in 1978, which allowed Baghdad, alongside Syria, to emerge as a counterbalance to Iran. On the other hand, Teheran had long sought recognition as a regional power but found itself labeled a “rogue state” by the US under

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<sup>13</sup> Kozhanov, N. A. (Ed.). (2022). Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East: New trends, old traditions. Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Sun, D., Xu, H., & Tu, Y. (2022). In with the New: China’s Nuclear-Energy Diplomacy in the Middle East. *Middle East Policy*, 29(1), 41–60.

<sup>15</sup> Fawcett, L. (2018). MENA and the EU: Contrasting approaches to region, power and order in a shared neighbourhood. *Contemporary Politics*, 24(1), 65–80.

<sup>16</sup> Rasmussen, M. V. (2002). “A Parallel Globalization of Terror”: 9-11, Security and Globalization. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 37(3), 325.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfowitz, P. (2002, October 3). *Building a Military for the 21st Century*. Prepared Statement for the House and Senate Armed Services Committees; Washington, DC: United States Department of Defense.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a US scholar and military strategist.

the Bush administration.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, Saudi Arabia, traditionally a more cautious and reluctant regional power, began to adopt a more assertive role. Disappointed by a cooling relationship with the US after the 9/11 attacks and facing terrorism within its borders, Riyadh started to diversify its international alliances, notably with China and Russia.

From a Turkish perspective, it is interesting to recall a metaphor that began circulating in the early 2000s to depict the external environment with which the newly elected AKP-led government had to cope. Indeed, when the AKP came to power in 2002, the “Bermuda Triangle”<sup>20</sup> metaphor was once again employed to describe Turkey’s pressing foreign policy challenges. This metaphor, which originally highlighted the volatile and uncertain nature of the regions surrounding the country in the immediate post-Cold War era, now symbolized the urgent issues that the new government needed to address. Unlike the earlier period, where the focus was on dealing with national interests within the limits of a bipolar order, the AKP faced a set of specific regional foreign policy dilemmas: the Cyprus question, the stalled EU negotiations, and the looming Iraq War, with its implications for Turkey, including pressure to join the conflict and support the removal of Saddam Hussein.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of this metaphor, what is undeniable is that these and other challenges carried significant potential consequences, either exacerbating Turkey’s security concerns or opening up opportunities for a more proactive foreign policy. What holds of the metaphor is that it had shifted dramatically from its previous usage, reflecting how the scope of foreign policy challenges had narrowed due to past mismanagement or the reluctance of earlier coalition governments to pursue assertive policies. By the early 2000s, there was little room for error, unlike in the 1990s when hesitancy had led to what became known in Turkey as the “lost decade.”<sup>22</sup> Despite these pressing foreign policy issues, the AKP government found itself in a relatively advantageous position. The absence of an immediate and existential threat allowed Turkey to approach these challenges without the intense pressure that had previously driven it to seek alliances or balance external dangers, as had been necessary during the Republic’s early years, World War II, and the early Cold War.<sup>23</sup> This “relatively threat-free period” expanded Turkey’s strategic options, providing the government with more potential margins of flexibility. While threats had not entirely disappeared, they were perceived as manageable within the means available, shifting the focus from a crisis-driven response to one of strategic adaptation. The

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<sup>19</sup> This shift in the US policy, combined with the instability in Iraq, can be seen as a factor that prompted Iran to become more assertive in its external posture, restarting its nuclear program in 2005 and expanding its regional influence, particularly through its alliances with Syria, and non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas. See Davies, G. A. M. (2008). Inside Out or Outside In: Domestic and International Factors Affecting Iranian Foreign Policy Towards the United States 1990-2004. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 4(3), 209–225.

<sup>20</sup> Bay, H., & Zengin, G. (2012). Hoca: Türk Dış Politikasında Davutoğlu Etkisi. *Insight Turkey*, 14(2), 196–197.

<sup>21</sup> Yükselen, 2020, 199.

<sup>22</sup> Idem.

<sup>23</sup> Kosebalaban, H. (2011). *Turkish foreign policy: Islam, nationalism, and globalization* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan, 172.

key issue was no longer about the resources or capabilities at Turkey's disposal but about how these resources were utilized to achieve strategic goals within the new international political setting.

While the details of the internal dynamics concerning TFP making will be explored later in this chapter, it is crucial to mention the AKP policymakers' role in revitalizing Turkey's posture on the global stage. The gradual shift in decision-making power away from the military led to the emergence of a new elite with distinct backgrounds and identities, bringing about a significant shift in how foreign policy elites perceived constraints and opportunities. Accordingly, the global and regional environments, once seen primarily as threats to national security and stability, were now viewed as arenas where the ambitions of the new leadership could flourish. The post-9/11 international system, in particular, presented Ankara with an unprecedented chance to pursue a more autonomous and ambitious foreign policy in the surrounding regions.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the AKP government's foreign policy doctrine began to emphasize active engagement with all regional systems through a multi-dimensional approach. Between 2003 and 2009, the evolving dynamics in the Middle East allowed the Ankara government to adopt a more assertive and revisionist stance towards the regional order. Yet, this posture implied neither openly aggressive actions nor a departure from Turkey's traditional paradigms. Instead, as authors like Donelli noted, the first decade of the AKP's foreign policy was dedicated to an "accommodation" strategy.<sup>25</sup> This implied that Ankara's policymakers aimed at transforming the country from a "coercive regional power to a benign power" and bringing about a transition from a "securitized nationalism to a de-securitized liberalism."<sup>26</sup> Various analyses<sup>27</sup> have attributed this transition towards a more general status as a civilian power to three closely interrelated characteristics: prioritization of cooperation and normalization of relations; a shift from a military and security-oriented stance to an economic approach typical of a trading state; and strong support for transnational and international organizations.<sup>28</sup> In concrete terms, the combination of crucial external and internal parameters changes became evident in the formulation of an approach labeled as a "zero problems with neighbors" strategy. This mindset and goals that characterized the AKP's second mandate (2007-2011) contributed to turning Ankara's attention to concepts such as the so-called civilizational geopolitics, in which the combination of increasing pragmatism and a renewed identity dimension expanded the range of tools used by Ankara to extend its external projection. While the theoretical and ideational bases of the doctrines of former Minister

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<sup>24</sup> Donelli, 2020, 231.

<sup>25</sup> Idem.

<sup>26</sup> For these terms, see Öniş, 2011, 47-65.

<sup>27</sup> Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> For an analysis of AKP's views, see Baudner, J. (2014). The Evolution of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AK Party Government. *Insight Turkey*, 16(3), 79-100.



Ahmet Davutoğlu will be elaborated in the following sections, it is here crucial to examine their actual causes and consequences for Turkish policy-making in two essential directions: the search for greater room for maneuver contextually with an equal relationship with more traditional partners; and the revitalization of its role in the Middle East context through a good-neighbor policy based on soft power mechanisms.<sup>29</sup>

### **6.1.2. From the Iraqi War to the “Turkish Model”**

The War in Iraq represented a critical juncture with international and regional implications. It not only enormously affected Turkey’s perceptions and margin of maneuver within its external environment but also epitomized the emergence of new, broader paradigms in TFP. Since the US played the role of the “game changer,” in order to understand the triggers and outcomes of such a watershed period, it is essential to examine Turkey-US relations in the context of the main events – instead of mere bilateral trends – surrounding this juncture.

A first element one should note is that while the US campaign in Afghanistan brought Ankara and Washington closer,<sup>30</sup> their policies on Iraq continued to suffer from more chronic divergences due to the Kurdish question and a general Turkish apprehensiveness about the dynamics of instability along its border with Iraq. Second, even before the 9/11 attacks, conservative members of Congress and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld supported a more aggressive stance towards Iraq, including arming opposition forces to overthrow Saddam Hussein.<sup>31</sup> This approach was a central component of the “neo-conservative” doctrine, which advocated for a reassertion of US power globally after what was perceived as the cautiousness of the Clinton administration. The events of 9/11 reinforced this policy, as highlighted in President Bush’s 2002 State of the Union address, where he infamously grouped Iraq, Iran, and North Korea into an “axis of evil.” Despite sharing wariness about the emergence of other regional hegemony, from the outset, Turkey immediately appeared hesitant to support US military action against Iraq, mainly due to concerns that it could lead to Iraq’s territorial disintegration and the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the north. By the time the AKP government was formed in November 2002, a US invasion of Iraq seemed increasingly likely, but Turkey’s stance remained ambiguous. Although the looming crisis was apparent, Iraq was scarcely addressed during the 2002 election campaign, and the fact that the “newcomer” AKP could not risk

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<sup>29</sup> For an overview, see Grigoriadis, Ioannis N. (2010). *The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy*.pdf. *ELIAMEP*; A. Davutoğlu, A. (2008). *Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007*. 10, 77–96; See also the reference page on the MFA’s website at “Sıfır Sorun Politikası”, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/yeni-donemde-sifir-sorun-politikasi.tr.mfa>.

<sup>30</sup> By late 2002, Turkey had deployed 1,300 troops in Afghanistan, and ISAF (the International Security Assistance Force), NATO’s mission on the ground, was under the command of Major General Hilmi Zorlu.

<sup>31</sup> Lang Jr, A. L. (2001). *Moral Dilemmas of U.S. Policy Toward Iraq*. *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*.

adventurous policies led to an unclear policy on the issue. According to Hale, Turkey faced a dilemma similar to that it had encountered during Özal's tenure in 1990,<sup>32</sup> where the need to preserve its "strategic partnership" with the US conflicted with widespread public opposition to involvement in Iraq.<sup>33</sup> This time, however, the situation was even more complicated. Unlike in 1990, there was no broad international support for action against Iraq, no clear United Nations mandate, and the US was asking far more of Turkey. Specifically, Washington wanted Turkey to allow US forces to use Turkish territory to open a "northern front" against Iraq, a request that Turkish leadership found challenging.<sup>34</sup>

On March 1, 2003, a critical vote in the Turkish Parliament<sup>35</sup> rejected the motion to allow U.S. forces to use Turkish soil, a decision that shocked the Bush administration<sup>36</sup> and led to what some referred to as the most significant crisis in Turkish-American relations after the "Johnson's Letter."<sup>37</sup> To give a sense of the US's harsh reaction, it is worth quoting Ambassador Robert Pearson, who stated that "seventy-two MPs from the AKP sided with the opposition, while nineteen abstained. The AKP Government is now badly shaken, AKP leader Erdoğan and PM Gül humiliated, and US-Turkish relations under severe strain."<sup>38</sup> Despite the AKP government's recommendation to support the motion, it was narrowly defeated, leaving Turkish policy in disarray with no contingency plan. Consequently, Ankara was sidelined during the Iraq invasion and had little influence over events in Iraq. As tensions peaked, the "Hood Incident" (*Çıval Olayı*) on July 4, 2003, where Turkish soldiers were detained by US forces in Iraq, further strained relations.<sup>39</sup> Although the US officials later apologized for the affair, it provoked waves of protests in the Turkish media, with the Chief of the

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<sup>32</sup> Hale, 2012, 149.

<sup>33</sup> See the polling results cited by Uslu, N., Toprak, M., Dalmis, I., & Aydın, E. (2005). Turkish Public Opinion toward the United States in the Context of the Iraq Question. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 9(3). Subsequent revelations about U.S. conduct in Iraq, including the torture at Abu Ghraib, further fueled anti-American sentiment in Turkey.

<sup>34</sup> Park, B. (2003). Strategic Location, Political Dislocation. Turkey, the United States, and Northern Iraq. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 7(2). In preparation for this there would be a first stage, in which the US military would inspect bases and communications in Turkey, to be followed by a second, or 'site preparation stage'. The third stage would be the landing of US forces, prior to the invasion of Iraq. Although Wolfowitz claimed afterwards that Turkish support was assured, it appears that Abdullah Gül, as Prime Minister, only agreed to implement the first stage: the second two would depend on parliamentary permission, as required by Article 92 of the Constitution. See Kapsis, J. E. (2005). The Failure of the US-Turkish Pre-war Negotiations: An Overconfident United States, Political Mismanagement and a Conflicted Military. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 9(3).

<sup>35</sup> The details of the domestic debates about the issue will be addressed in the next sections.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Wolfowitz described it as a "big, big mistake." Quoted in Pipes, D. (2003, August 5). Turkey's Radical Turn. *New York Post*. For neoconservative critics, it was seen as part of an 'Islamist agenda' by the AKP, which aimed to 'undercut the West's war on terrorism. For a sober but still pessimistic assessment, which fails to put any blame for the deterioration of the Bush administration, see Walker, J. W. (2008). Reexamining the U.S.-Turkish Alliance. *The Washington Quarterly*, 31(1), 93–109. See also the next note.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis, J. E. (2006). Replace Turkey as a strategic partner? *Middle East Quarterly*, 13(2), 46. This argument rested on the highly dubious claim, which was unsupported by any provable and material evidence, that the AKP had received 'billions of dollars from the Persian Gulf and other Islamist sources. For more in this exaggerated vein, see Rubin, M. (2005). Green money, Islamist politics in Turkey. *Middle East Quarterly*, 12(1), 13–23.

<sup>38</sup> Pearson, R. (2008). Turkey's New Era. *American Diplomacy*.

<sup>39</sup> A group of Turkish soldiers operating in Iraqi Kurdistan were detained by American forces, who placed hoods over their heads and took them away for interrogation. Following this, American troops raided a Turkish safehouse in Sulaymaniyah, seizing 15 kilograms of explosives, along with sniper rifles, grenades, and maps of Kirkuk that marked positions near the local governor's building. Turkey filed a diplomatic protest with the United States, and the Turkish soldiers were released after spending 60 hours in American custody. See Akçay, 2021.

General Staff, Hilmi Özkök, describing it as “the biggest crisis of confidence” between Turkey and the US.<sup>40</sup>

The “strategic partnership” thus seemed to have been abandoned by both sides, with the Iraqi Kurds now treated as America’s best allies in the region.<sup>41</sup> The most pressing impediment was the fact that Turkey’s frustrations were compounded by the resurgence in northern Iraq of the PKK, which exploited the power vacuum to increase its activities and found no significant obstacles from the US and Iraqi Kurds’ political factions.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the US occupation of Iraq made it impossible for the Turkish Armed Forces to conduct cross-border operations as they had earlier. However, in 2007, escalating PKK attacks prompted the Turkish government to authorize cross-border military operations into Iraq, despite initial opposition from both Prime Minister Erdoğan and the US government. This marked a departure from what happened in the First Gulf War when Turkey had aligned with the US on the most concerning issues. Instead, this time, Ankara’s “more daring behavior made the US President realize that he had to go some way to meet Turkish demands since if he failed to do so, there was the possibility that Turkey might act unilaterally in Iraq.”<sup>43</sup> Whatever the counterfactual truth, a visit by Erdoğan to Washington in November 2007 led to an agreement where the US would provide Turkey with intelligence on PKK activities, effectively allowing Turkey to carry out targeted operations. This agreement eased tensions and was seen as a turning point in Turkish-American relations, leading to the development of a “*new modus vivendi*.”

Expectations for better Turkish-American relations rose after Barack Obama’s election as US President in November 2008. Obama, who had opposed the 2003 Iraq invasion, was seen as more sympathetic to Turkey’s positions. His administration recognized Turkey’s importance as a democratic Muslim nation that could help mend the rift between the US and the Muslim/Arab world. Obama’s visit to Turkey in April 2009 was well received when, although the “strategic partnership” label had been dropped from the official vocabulary, he described the US-Turkey relationship as a “model partnership.”<sup>44</sup> For instance, in the aftermath of the 2007 Turkish parliamentary elections, Nicholas Burns – then US Secretary of State – commended Turkey as “the most impressive

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<sup>40</sup> Yetkin, M. (2004). *Tezkere: Irak krizinin gerçek öyküsü* (2. basım). Remzi Kitabevi, 220-22; Hürriyet, 5, 8 July 2003; Park, B. (2004). Between Europe, the United States and the Middle East: Turkey and European security in the wake of the Iraq crisis. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 5(3), 501.

<sup>41</sup> See for instance, the comments by Oliphant, T. (2003, April 13). A Lesson for Turkey from Kurdish Allies. *Boston Globe*, quoted by Çandar, C. (2004). Turkish Foreign Policy and the War on Iraq. In L. G. Martin & D. Kairidēs (Eds.), *The future of Turkish foreign policy*. Conference on Turkish Foreign Policy, Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, 53.

<sup>42</sup> Barkey, H. J. (2010). *Turkey’s New Engagement in Iraq*. 1–20.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Former Turkish Diplomat at the time.

<sup>44</sup> Flanagan, S. (2009, May 14). The United States and Turkey: A Model Partnership. Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on European Affairs.

democracy in the Muslim world.”<sup>45</sup> During a brief initial phase, Turkey and the US actually cooperated in several key areas, including Turkey’s contributions to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and the reconstruction of Iraq. The opening of direct relations between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq also removed a significant point of contention between the two countries. These concrete improvements revitalized, both in Ankara and Washington, the discourse of the “Turkish Model” concept advanced by Özal right after the Cold War’s end. From a US perspective, the Obama administration’s rhetoric seemed to recall Anthony Blinken’s words when he was President Clinton’s Special Assistant:

Turkey sits at the crossroads – or, if you prefer, atop the fault lines – of the world. Because of its place...its history...its size...and strength, and most importantly, because of what it is – a nation of mainly Islamic faith that is secular, democratic, and modernizing – Turkey must be a leader and can be a role model for a large swath of the world.<sup>46</sup>

However, this view was also shared by the Republicans, as demonstrated by President Bush’s visit to Istanbul in 2004, where he attempted to launch the “Broader Middle East Initiative” intended to promote democratization throughout the region.<sup>47</sup> At the time,

The Bush administration [had] much invested in the success of Turkey’s new government, which it [was] holding up to other countries around the Muslim world as a model of Islamic administration in a secular democracy. As he put to the audience at Galatasaray University during a NATO summit in Istanbul on 29 June 2004: ‘Your country, with 150 years of democratic and social reform, stands as a model to others, and as Europe’s bridge to the wider world.’<sup>48</sup>

The perception of a renovated trust and endorsement of Turkey’s greater role in the region prompted the Turkish establishment to undertake some symbolic actions. Above all, against the return of Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, an initiative co-sponsored by Erdoğan and Spain’s leftist Prime Minister José Luiz Rodriguez Zapatero launched the Alliance of Civilizations

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<sup>45</sup> Babacan, A. (2008, June 3). *Speech delivered by H. E. Ali Babacan, Foreign Minister of Turkey, the Atlantic Council, Global Leadership Speaker Series* [Online post]. Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-h\\_e\\_-ali-babacan\\_-foreign-minister-of-turkey\\_-the-atlantic-council\\_global-leadership-speaker-series\\_-3-june-2008.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-h_e_-ali-babacan_-foreign-minister-of-turkey_-the-atlantic-council_global-leadership-speaker-series_-3-june-2008.en.mfa).

<sup>46</sup> Address to the Washington Institute’s Third Annual Turgut Özal Memorial Lecture on Turkey and US-Turkish Relations, Policy Watch. Quoted in Altunışık, 2005, 45.

<sup>47</sup> The White House. (2004, June 29). *President’s Remarks at Galatasaray University*. [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06). At the time it did little to improve relations, as it was perceived as “too closely aligned with American interests. Grigoriadis, I. N. (2010). Friends No More? The Rise of Anti-American Nationalism in Turkey. *The Middle East Journal*, 64(1), 60-61; Güney, A. (2008). Anti-Americanism in Turkey: Past and Present. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44(3), 471-487; Arnett, D. (n.d.). Problems of Perception and Vision: Turkey and the US. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 7(1), 471-487. These were aggravated by a best-selling Turkish novel, *Metal Storm*, depicting a war between Turkey and the United States, and the Turkish film *Valley of the Wolves – Iraq*, in which the Americans were depicted as ruthless aggressors.

<sup>48</sup> This is extracted from an interview that the author of this thesis had with a Senior expert of Turkish-American based on a full transcript of those declarations published by The Guardian. (2004, June 29). *George Bush addresses the NATO summit in Turkey*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jun/29/eu.nato1>, and Grossman, M. (2005, February 10). *The U.S.-Turkish Partnership*. Remarks to the American Turkish Society (Meet the Ambassadors Series); The Knickerbocker Club, New York, NY. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/us/rm/42115.htm>.

(AoC) in 2005. Validated by the United Nations, it aimed at combatting the various extremist elements exploiting the mutual suspicion, fear, and polarization between the Muslim countries and Western societies.”<sup>49</sup>

Overall, almost until 2010, Turkey was often cited as a model for political reform in the Middle East. However, this idea was never fully explained beyond suggesting that the country exemplified the compatibility of Islam and democracy. This vagueness sparked a debate within Turkey about the implications of such a characterization and whether the US was assigning a specific role to the country. As Bechev remarks, “Needless to say, the new Turkey stood as a representative of the Muslim world, an aspiration which sat badly with Erdoğan-skeptics at the time.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the issue blew up when US Secretary of State Colin Powell referred to Turkey as an “Islamic Republic” in April 2004, which fueled widespread criticism in Turkey’s secular establishment.<sup>51</sup> While Turkish President Sezer asserted that “Turkey is neither an Islamic republic nor an example of moderate Islam,”<sup>52</sup> concerns arose over what this model status implied for Turkey’s regional identity, with a general fear it would position Turkey more closely with the Middle East rather than Europe, which the traditional establishment had long aspired to join.<sup>53</sup> At this point, while a critical Turkish perspective on the question is left for later, it is worth recalling another angle from which to look at the roots and implications of this concept. A fresh view is offered by Benhaïm and Öktem, who noted that “The “Turkish model cycle is [...] an expression of the evolving nature of [US-Turkey] bilateral relation. The post-9/11 international context, in combination with the first AKP government in Turkey and the US invasion of Iraq, opened a new phase in the evolution of the Turkish model’ discourse.”<sup>54</sup> From their perspective, this relates to the “Turkish soft power discourse” that

resembles an amorphous body of overlapping ideas and activities (also termed hyper-activism or pro-activism), which eventually became generalized in academic circles and think-tanks after its emergence in 2001. It is grounded in the idea that Turkey’s civilian rule, democratic norms, and economic success are key elements for the diffusion of a positive image of the country abroad with the aim to create power capabilities where military power is not a viable option.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See the details on the official website at <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-alliance-of-civilizations-initiative.en.mfa>.

<sup>50</sup> Bechev, D. (2022). Turkey under Erdoğan: How a country turned from democracy and the West. Yale University Press, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Powell's comments on Turkey being an Islamic Republic were made during an interview on German television while discussing the part Shari'a law would play in the new Iraq. The Secretary of State said that Islamic law would form one of the foundations of the new regime in Iraq: “There will be an Islamic Republic in Iraq just like other Islamic Republics such as Turkey and Pakistan...There is no reason why Islam cannot be together with democracy. Turkey is an Islamic country, why would there not be a democracy just like there is in Turkey at the same time.”

<sup>52</sup> Nigar Göksel, “Thematic Priorities as the NATO Summit nears,” ARI Position Paper, May 2004 cited in Everts, S. (n.d.). *An asset but not a model: Turkey, the EU and the wider Middle East*.

<sup>53</sup> Idem.

<sup>54</sup> Benhaïm, Y., & Öktem, K. (2015). The rise and fall of Turkey’s soft power discourse: Discourse in foreign policy under Davutoğlu and Erdoğan. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 1, 1-25.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 2. See also Keyman, E. F. (2012). Proactivism in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Global-Local Nexus. In K. Öktem, A. Kadioğlu, & M. Karlı (Eds.), *Another empire? A decade of Turkey’s foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party* (1. ed). İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

As such, to explain the scope of the debate on the “Turkish model” among American circles, one can raise the hypothesis that “beyond Turkey, it is the American model that is at stake in an important part of this literature: the promotion of democracy, capitalism, and secularism via the example of Turkey is first and foremost a way for the United States to promote its interests.”<sup>56</sup>

However, this does not necessarily mean a lack of a genuine belief from some American circles to restore relations with Turkey in a way that was functional to US interests in the Middle East. For instance, in an audience at the Congress (2009) response to Obama’s visit to Istanbul, Flanagan claimed

As the United States rethinks its own approach to the Middle East, it needs to make space for an increasingly activist Turkish diplomacy in the region. The United States could benefit from Turkey’s soft influence and efforts to stabilize the Middle East. How Ankara and Washington shape Turkey’s resurgence in the region will likely affect the development of a broad range of common interests including Iraq’s stability, Iran’s pursuit of nuclear technology, and Arab-Israeli peace efforts. Turkey has shown it can be an effective diplomatic player and has potential to do more. Its mediation of indirect Israel-Syria talks and its work to promote the Iraqi Status of Force Agreement with the United States are important precedents of successful Turkish mediation.<sup>57</sup>

Still, unclarity on how to make sense of such concepts in a broader conceptual and more long-term practical way remained unanswered as the conclusions were on a different tone: “Turkey has yet to prove that it can play a leading role in regional affairs, and it remains unclear how much influence it actually possesses over a range of actors in the region.”<sup>58</sup> On this matter, a very critical view was expressed by Nuh Yilmaz, who would then become a key personality in Turkish Foreign Policy. In 2010, he wrote:

I argue that the “model partnership” has not ended; on the contrary, it has not even started. “Model partnership” is not a well-defined and all-encompassing type of relationship. This concept is premised on the recognition that Turkish-American relations are very valuable and that the old framework, which threatens the bilateral relationship itself, needs to change. In other words, it is not a “model” describing how Turkish-American relations are today. On the contrary, “model partnership” is the “will to redefine” bilateral relations. As such, I will treat it as an “empty signifier.”[...] The current problem derives from the gradual transformation in the nature of Turkish-American relations from a hierarchical relationship into a complementary one, i.e., from a “strategic partnership” to a “model partnership.”<sup>59</sup>

To put it in another way, many in Ankara saw the cause of the ongoing tension that marked those years “did not merely emanate from disagreements over policy problems.” Instead, “policy disagreements were the consequences of this transformation at the very core of the partnership and

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> Flanagan, 2009, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Idem.

<sup>59</sup> Yilmaz, N. (2011). U.S.-Turkey Relations: Model Partnership as an ‘Empty Signifier.’ *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), 20.

any attempt to resolve problems between the two countries, without serious consideration of this structural change, was doomed to fail.”<sup>60</sup> According to such critical voices, the US side was traditionally seen as the “privileged” party in the “strategic partnership,” while the Turkish side was the “submissive” one lacking the “subject” status enjoyed by Washington. Yet, within the context of the critical junctures shaping its external level in the first decade of the 2000s, the Turkish leadership began pushing for a more egalitarian relationship by focusing on political issues rather than policy issues to be recognized as a “political subject.”<sup>61</sup> In Yilmaz’s words,

Turkey is on course to have a real say in the destiny of affairs it is asked to have a stake in. In the past, it has simply assumed its role in scenarios designed by the US in a bipolar world. However, just as that anomalous reality no longer exists, the very definition of the relationship is to be redefined through thoughtful conceptual consideration.<sup>62</sup>

Still, despite these critical appraisals from Turkey and the unclarity of the US’s interpretations of the concept, the “Turkish Model” formula represented a solid ground for the new Turkish emerging elite to implement its “zero problems with neighbors” policy. Especially in the Arab and Muslim World, perspectives on Turkey began to shift in a more favorable direction.<sup>63</sup> The rise of the AKP, increasing external pressures for political reform, and a deepening sense of crisis in the region prompted a more attentive reconsideration of what Turkey could represent. Many Arab commentators started to view the “Turkish experiment,” characterized by a democratic system that allowed the AKP to emerge and transform itself into a party that could concurrently support Islamic/traditional values and modernity, as both “important and successful.”<sup>64</sup> This shift led to a broader recognition that Turkey’s democracy was genuine, not merely a façade. As expressed by a former Yemeni Foreign Minister at the Congress of Democrats from the Islamic World in Istanbul, “It was a conscious choice to hold this meeting in Turkey. The (Turkish) Islamic movement embraced the secular state. This new experience in Turkey is a model for all Muslim countries.”<sup>65</sup> This “Turkish experiment” also reintroduced secularism into the broader debate about democracy. Radwan Masmoudi, President of the US-based Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), observed that “a party with Islamic roots has come to power, but it now says it believes in secularism and that is compatible with

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem. This was confirmed by interviews with former Turkish Diplomats.

<sup>61</sup> For these terms and discussions, see Han, A. K. (2010). From “Strategic Partnership” to “Model Partnership”: AKP, Turkish-US Relation and the Prospects Under Obama. *UNISCI Discussion Papers*; Albright, M., & Hadley, S. J. (with Council on Foreign Relations). (2012). *U.S.-Turkey relations: A new partnership* (S. A. Cook, Ed.). Council on Foreign Relations Press.

<sup>62</sup> Yilmaz, 2011, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Fuller argues that “Now that Turkey’s profile is more sympathetic to Muslim states, its own domestic accomplishments are viewed with greater sympathy and respect, thus facilitating Turkey’s serving in part as a regional model. See Fuller, 2009.

<sup>64</sup> This was taken from an article entitled “The New Turkey and the Arab Political System” by a Turkish affairs specialist in Lebanon, Jihad al-Zain. It was published in the Beirut daily Al-Nahar on 20 June 2004. See “Turkey’s Political Model,” Middle East Economic Survey XLVII, 28 June 2004, <http://www.mees.com/postedarticles/politics/ArabPressReview/a47n26c02.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Al Jazeera , April 13, 2004.

Islam.”<sup>66</sup> The feeling was that this development could potentially change the perception of secularism in other Muslim countries, where secular democrats have often preferred to identify as liberals or nationalists rather than secularists.<sup>67</sup> In short, Turkey once more became “an exporter of ideas in the region despite the “large weight of ideological, political, and even cultural reservations about Turkey that existed until recently in Arab official circles and among the political elite.”<sup>68</sup>

In concrete terms, Turkey’s decision to block the US troops from using Turkish territory to open a second front against Iraq, its improved relations with several regional countries, and an increased rhetoric blinking the eye to “civilization geopolitics”<sup>69</sup> further boosted Turkey’s credibility in different contexts. These bold policies were perceived as signs of strength rooted in democracy. According to the TESEV Report, Turkey experienced soaring popularity and was seen as a model by the states and people of the region. In a 2009 survey, 61% of respondents felt that Turkey could be a regional model. In 2010, that figure rose to 66%.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the election of a Turkish Secretary-General (Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu) to the Organization of the Islamic Conference signaled Turkey’s enhanced standing among Islamic governments. Finally, Turkey’s EU accession process became a point of interest for many Arab reformers, serving as a test case to see whether the EU would have incorporated a Muslim country or rejected it due to cultural differences. Therefore, the following section addresses what this implied for the process of “change” in TFP.

### **6.1.3. Areas of Interest and the Primacy of the Middle East**

If the initial period of the AKP’s mandate had served to legitimize the party’s innovative positions, successes in the economic sphere, coupled with rare stability in the domestic sphere during its second term (2007-2011) in office, increased Ankara’s level of confidence and allowed for an unprecedented enlargement of its room for maneuver. As early as 2005, especially in the Middle Eastern theater, but also in other external contexts, Turkey seemed to faithfully pursue the lines drawn by Davutoğlu and its zero problems with neighbors strategy. Exploiting a necessary balancing act with the Euro-Atlantic shore, it attempted to present itself as a liberal force capable of normalizing relations with its neighborhood, whether through the expansion of bilateral economic relations or through soft power tools and mediation actions.<sup>71</sup> Various analyses assessed this phase as a gradual

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<sup>66</sup> Christian Science Monitor, 2 June 2003.

<sup>67</sup> Interview.

<sup>68</sup> al-Zain, 2004.

<sup>69</sup> For a full explanation of the term and its application to TFP, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>70</sup> Akgün, M., & Gündoğar, S. S. (2014). *The perception of Turkey in the Middle East 2013* (1. ed). TESEV.

<sup>71</sup> Barkey, H. J. (2012). The Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East. *TESEV Foreign Policy Programme*, 1.



attempt by Turkey to become a preeminent actor in its immediate neighborhood and beyond, with the goal of solving chronic regional problems and building a “belt of peace.”<sup>72</sup> It is in this light that the proactivity and multidimensionality of what was called a “new Turkish foreign policy” can only be comprehensively explained in terms of a close interrelationship between economic, security, and identity spheres.<sup>73</sup> Border security acquired as a cornerstone the promotion of vigorous interdependence among regional partners, a priority to keep alive a virtuous circle that would fuel Turkey’s growing economic and commercial dynamism. “The diversification of external relations was also largely contributed to the need for diversification by the 2008 global financial crisis,”<sup>74</sup> which sanctioned a decrease in trade volumes with Western partners and actually favored the search for new markets outside Europe. Moreover, the growing economic availability encouraged copious investments in humanitarian and development fields, even in areas geographical traditionally far from the Turkish center of gravity.<sup>75</sup> The latter was certainly a primary sign of using new tools for Ankara’s external projection, which “could take root where pragmatism was combined with a renewed identity dimension.”<sup>76</sup> In essence, the AKP was sending a message that decreed a predisposition to develop close relations with each state, free of political-ideological preconditions and striving for equal partnerships on the basis of a shared economic interest and/or cultural heritage. This approach, which envisioned a fully cooperative relationship while respecting the principle of non-interference in internal state affairs, allowed the AKP elite to approach the various authoritarian regimes in the region and actors traditionally distant from the Turkish orbit. A situation that was destined to change dramatically with the onset of the Arab revolutions in early 2011, but until then it experienced a real improvement in neighborly relations and a broadening of its reach.

The most surprising initiative and result of the zero problem with neighbor’s era was the normalization of Turkey’s relations with Syria under Bashar al-Assad’s rule.<sup>77</sup> For a time, this became the flagship of a broad and much more active Turkish role in the Middle East, in which Turkey seemed to “be filling a regional power vacuum now that the leading Arab states – notably Iraq and Egypt – had lost their former influence.”<sup>78</sup> The fact that the Turkish Parliament refused to back the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and that it later took a strongly critical line against Israel won the AKP government mass support in the Arab world, for which there was no historical precedent.<sup>79</sup> The first

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<sup>72</sup> Idem.

<sup>73</sup> Öniş, 2011.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with a former Turkish official to the EU. See also Öniş, Z., & Güven, A. B. (2011). Global Crisis, National Responses: The Political Economy of Turkish Exceptionalism. *New Political Economy*, 16(5), 585–608.

<sup>75</sup> Details of such material capabilities will be addressed in a specific section.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with former Turkish diplomat and MP.

<sup>77</sup> Bishku, M. B. (2012). Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Checkered History. *Middle East Policy*, 19(3), 36–53.

<sup>78</sup> Hale, 2012, see Chapter 11.

<sup>79</sup> See Akgün et al. 2009.

significant indication of this shift occurred in June 2000, following the death of Hafiz al-Assad, when Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer attended the funeral in Damascus, marking the first visit by a Turkish President to the Syrian capital since the state's founding in 1946. After some delays, Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father as President of Syria, reciprocated with a visit to Ankara in January 2004 – another diplomatic milestone. Beyond the improved diplomatic atmosphere, notable achievements of this new relationship included signing a free trade agreement in December 2004 and opening the border between the two countries for visa-free travel in October 2009. As a result, mutual trade saw a significant increase, growing from \$643 million in 2004 to nearly \$2.3 billion by 2010. Additionally, on December 24, 2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Damascus for comprehensive discussions with President Assad, which were presented as the inaugural high-level meeting of a “High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council” between the two nations.<sup>80</sup> By 2010, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu was proposing that the Turkish-Syrian entente could expand into the broader Middle Eastern free trade and travel zone, including Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, with the ambitious goal of creating “the Middle East’s version” of the European Union.<sup>81</sup> Despite these advances, unresolved issues tempered these ambitions. Israel reacted negatively to Turkey’s growing friendship with Syria, and the relationship also drew sharp criticism from Washington, particularly during the George W. Bush administration, which viewed Syria with deep suspicion. Tensions peaked in April 2005 when President Sezer made a second visit to Damascus, coinciding with intense US pressure on Syria following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, which Syrian agents allegedly orchestrated.<sup>82</sup>

Seemingly, raising apprehension in the US was also Turkey's ambiguous relations with Iran. While for Washington, Iran was on the list of the “rogue states,” Turkey could not afford, either politically or economically, to have a serious collision with its large and powerful neighbor, from which depended on a substantial proportion of its natural gas supplies as well as an important export market. Yet, for some, the AKP’s stance towards Teheran reflected a pro-Islamic bias on the part of the party’s leadership. For instance, PM Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gül were bold enough to be among the first to congratulate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad after his highly contested re-election as Iran’s President in 2009. However, although religious sympathies may have played a role in the margins of government thinking, it seems safe to state that material concerns represented the

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<sup>80</sup> Altunışık, M. B., & Tür, Ö. (2006). From Distant Neighbors to Partners? Changing Syrian-Turkish Relations. *Security Dialogue*, 37(2), 242-43.

<sup>81</sup> Indeed, it took the symbolic name of *Şamgen*, from the Turkish word Şam, a toponym for Damascus and, by extension, Syria and the Levant, CNN Türk. (2003, March 7). “Schengen” olmazsa “Şamgen” verelim! <https://www.cnntrk.com/dunya/schengen-olmazsa-samgen-verelim-120931>.

<sup>82</sup> Altunışık & Tür, 2006, 242-43.

main element in shaping their bilateral relations, often defined as a “frenemy relation.”<sup>83</sup> First, one clear area of convergence of the period was the change in the Iranian approach towards the Kurdish Issue. Indeed, while the activities of the PKK drove Turkey and Iran apart during the 1990s, after 2004, they brought them together as an Iranian–Kurdish branch of the PKK – known as the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK), began attacks into Iranian territory.<sup>84</sup> Second, as in the case of the other Middle Eastern countries, Turkey’s trade with Iran grew exponentially after the mid-1990s, from a total of just over \$1.1 billion in 1996 to almost \$10.7 billion in 2010. Within this total, however, there was a huge imbalance in Iran’s favor, with exports to Turkey reaching more than \$7.6 billion in 201, against imports of just over \$3 billion. Within this, oil and natural gas accounted for the vast majority of Turkey’s imports from Iran.<sup>85</sup> Still, the primary issue at stake concerned the risks related to Iran’s attempt to pursue the development of nuclear weapons. “While this represented a serious threat, Turkish officials either downplayed the likelihood of such hazards or argued that even if it were, Turkey would not be a direct target.”<sup>86</sup> Whatever the real perception, Turkey seemed to follow “by heart” its activist policy and diplomatic efforts of the time when, alongside Brazil, brokered an agreement with Iran on May 17, 2010.<sup>87</sup> Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and his Brazilian counterpart, Celso Amorim, presented the agreement as a significant diplomatic achievement. However, the US and other Western nations met the deal with skepticism. The situation worsened on June 9, 2010, when Turkey and Brazil, both non-permanent members of the UN Security Council, voted against the sanctions resolution.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, however, this bold initiative would slowly show its limits. Indeed, Iran and Turkey went on vying for influence in Iraq and, less overtly, in Syria. As some speculated in “Ankara’s palaces,” while the AKP presented its normalization policies as well-intentioned toward Muslim fellows, in reality, “Turkish policymakers and diplomats sold their official strategy to the skeptical West as a means to deter the Syrian regime from Iran.”<sup>89</sup> This might not be mere guesswork when considering that, at NATO’s Lisbon Summit in 2010, Turkey agreed to join the US-proposed initiative for a missile shield, a move perceived as directed against Teheran and

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<sup>83</sup> Akbarzadeh, S., & Barry, J. (2017). Iran and Turkey: Not quite enemies but less than friends. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(4), 980–995.

<sup>84</sup> McCurdy, D. (2008). Turkish–Iranian Relations: When Opposites Attract. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 7(2), 96. The Iranian government alleges that PJAK is supported by the US, and a representative of the organization, Rahman Haj-Ahmadi, visited Washington in August 2007 in a bid for weapons and ammunition. His visit appears to have been in vain, however, as he failed to get an interview with administration officials. More concretely, in April 2008, a meeting of Turkey–Iran High-Security Commission signed a memorandum of understanding to increase cooperation and exchange intelligence on PKK/PJAK, while two months later, General Irfan Başbuğ, then the Turkish Commander of Land Forces, confirmed that the two countries were coordinating military operations against it.

<sup>85</sup> Hale, 2012, 241.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with a Turkish expert of Iran.

<sup>87</sup> The deal involved Iran sending 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium to Turkey, with the understanding that another country would supply 120 kilograms of 20 % enriched uranium for use in an Iranian reactor.

<sup>88</sup> Karacasulu, N., & Karakir, I. A. (2011). Iran-Turkey Relations in the 2000s: Pragmatic Rapprochement. *Ege Akademik Bakış*, 11(1).

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Turkish MP.

Moscow.<sup>90</sup> While Turkey championed, along with Brazil, a compromise on the Iranian nuclear file in May 2010 and later facilitated the so-called P5+1 talks, it “invested in an insurance policy against Tehran.”<sup>91</sup>

In this period, Turkey witnessed an improvement in its relations with the various relevant political actors in post-Saddam Iraq. Indeed, as Iraq began forming its new political structures, Turkish-Iraqi relations regained a “measure of independence.” As usual, a central concern for Turkey was the future status of the Iraqi Kurds and the contested city of Kirkuk, claimed by Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen alike. Despite the potential for conflict, there were some encouraging developments. In January 2005, following elections to Iraq’s Transitional National Council, Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), was elected President of Iraq in April. This development was crucial for Turkey, as it “signaled that one of the key Kurdish leaders in Iraq now held a significant position of power in Baghdad, thereby reducing the likelihood of Kurdish secession from the Iraqi state.”<sup>92</sup> Turkey’s concerns regarding Iraq’s stability were further alleviated in May 2005 when Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari made his first official visit to Ankara. During this visit, al-Jafari assured Turkish officials that his government would not permit any group within Iraq, implicitly referring to the PKK, to undermine the security of neighboring countries. This commitment provided Turkey with a degree of reassurance about Iraq’s future and its potential impact on regional stability.

Therefore, if until then, the posture toward Baghdad had been limited to unilaterally appeasing the moves of the PKK and Kurdish autonomist drives on the border, the Turkish doctrine on the matter “shifted from containment to dual engagement.”<sup>93</sup> On the one hand, Ankara engaged in a diplomatic and business dialogue with the federal government that created a Supreme Council for Strategic Cooperation against the common terrorist threat. Although an unstated Turkish aim was to prevent Iranian domination of Iraq, Turkey was careful not to take sides in the sectarian strife, trying to maintain balanced relations with both the Shi’ite and Sunni parties. This was also due to the fact that Ankara still had little leverage over Iraq’s turbulent domestic politics, which carried the constant risk of systemic breakdown or even civil war. On the other, the exclusive 2009 official state visit to the north decreed on the Turkish side a legitimization of the autonomous KRG of Masoud Barzani. Although the dispute over energy sources in the Kirkuk area remained unresolved, the opening of a

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<sup>90</sup> Indeed, two years later, an early warning radar was installed at the Kürecik base near Malatya, once used as a surveillance outpost to monitor the Soviet airspace.

<sup>91</sup> The other states were the UN Security Council’s permanent members, along with Germany. See Ülgen, S. (2010). *A Place in the Sun or Fifteen Minutes of Fame? Understanding Turkey’s New Foreign Policy*. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Turkish PM and expert on the issue.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with senior expert involved in TFP making.

consulate in Erbil signaled Ankara's intention to profit from economic and trade cooperation, as well as carve out a more secure outlet to the east.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, also in this case pragmatic and material considerations seemed to be the main driver for TFP. The development of economic ties with Iraq became crucial for Turkey, particularly considering that Iraq had been one of Turkey's major trading partners before the imposition of UN sanctions in 1990. As the Iraqi economy slowly began to recover, bilateral trade between the two countries more than tripled from 2004 to 2010, increasing from just under \$2 billion to nearly \$6.2 billion. This economic revival had two politically significant implications for Turkey. First, it stimulated economic activity in Turkey's Kurdish-inhabited southeast, which could potentially undermine the economic foundation of the PKK's grassroots support in the region. Second, a substantial portion of Turkey's exports were directed to the Kurdish region of Iraq, thereby creating a significant economic dependency of the Kurdish region on Turkey.<sup>95</sup>

Obviously, Turkey's normalization process with the Arab World and the "axis of evil" came with a price on other sides. Indeed, Ankara's popularity within the Arab and Muslim World began to represent a source of strife in its relations with Israel and the US. Initially, despite its Islamist roots, the AKP maintained a pro-Western policy toward Israel. In May 2005, Erdoğan visited the country and paid his respects at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, and by 2007, Turkey's reputation as an honest broker in the region was solidified when both Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas addressed the Turkish Parliament, even signing a Turkish-funded agreement for an industrial plant in Gaza. However, Turkey's relationship with Israel began to shift as the AKP deepened its ties with Hamas, which was designated as a terrorist organization in Israel, the US, and widely in Europe. Despite the backlash, Erdoğan defended his position, emphasizing Hamas's electoral victory in 2006.<sup>96</sup> Turkey attempted to use these ties to mediate conflicts, such as during the negotiations for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, which saw Erdoğan personally thanked by President Peres.<sup>97</sup> It also sought to mediate between Israel and Syria in the mid-2000s, with secret talks aiming at a potential Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in exchange for peace. These efforts nearly succeeded, but the process collapsed after Israel's 2008 military operation "Cast Lead" in Gaza, which began shortly after Prime Minister Ehud Olmert visited Ankara. As some Turkish officials confirmed, this happened with no advance warning.<sup>98</sup> From this point on, the Syrian–

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<sup>94</sup> Özcan, M. (2010). Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Iraq in 2009. *Perceptions (Ankara, Turkey)*, 15(3/4), 113.

<sup>95</sup> Zaman, A. (2010). Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds: From Red Lines to Red Carpets. *German Marshall Fund of the United States*, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Reuters. (2011, October 18). *Some 10 Palestinians to go to Turkey in captive swap*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/commodities/some-10-palestinians-to-go-to-turkey-in-captive-swap-idUSL5E7LI46Z/>.

<sup>97</sup> Efraim, O. (2011, December 10). Peres lauds Erdogan efforts on Shalit. *Ynetnews*. <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4134596,00.html>

<sup>98</sup> Bechev reports a conversation with a senior figure, stating, "We were calling them, but they kept us in the dark." Whether true or not, this feeling was also confirmed by the conversation the author of this thesis had with high-ranking figures at the time. See Bechev, 2022, 229.

Israeli peace process collapsed, leaving Erdoğan convinced that he had been deliberately deceived by the Israelis, who were secretly preparing the assault just when their Prime Minister was supposedly talking peace in Ankara.<sup>99</sup> Feeling betrayed by Israel, Erdoğan's relationship with the Israeli government soured, leading to a public confrontation with President Peres at the 2009 Davos Economic Forum, where the Turkish PM stormed off the stage after enflamed words, such as "Nobody can even speak to a tribe leader so loudly and in front of the international community, and not to the leader of the Republic of Turkey" and "you know very well how to kill."<sup>100</sup> The already strained relations hit a breaking point with the Mavi Marmara incident in May 2010, where Israeli commandos boarded a Turkish NGO's ship headed for Gaza, resulting in the deaths of nine activists.<sup>101</sup> This event led Erdoğan to accuse Israel of "state terrorism," suspend military ties, and expel the Israeli Ambassador.<sup>102</sup> In the aftermath, Erdoğan's actions won him widespread admiration across the Arab world, where he was seen as a champion against Israel, contrasting sharply with the perceived complicity of Arab leaders. Domestically, the tension with Israel also intersected with Turkey's internal politics, particularly during the post-2013 crackdown on the Gülen movement<sup>103</sup>, which had previously advocated for good relations with Israel. This period saw an increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric within Turkey, further complicating the already fragile relationship between the two nations.

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<sup>99</sup> International Crisis Group. (2010). *Turkey's Crises over Israel and Iran*. 208, 3.

<sup>100</sup> The atmosphere was further soured just one year later when the Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, a member of the rabidly anti-Arab Israel Beitenu party, publicly humiliated the Turkish ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol by seating him in a lower chair than himself for a televised interview and planting only an Israeli flag on the table, pointing this out to the assembled press in Hebrew (which the Ambassador did not speak). The Israeli government later apologized, but by this stage, the damage had been done. See *Hürriyet*. (2010, June 3). *Tel Aviv Büyükelçisi Türkiye'de*. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/14919615.asp>.

<sup>101</sup> The pro-Islamist Humanitarian Relief Foundation, mainly known by its Turkish acronym IHH,<sup>15</sup> had been set up in 1995 in response to the Bosnian crisis. Apparently, its informal political links were with the pro-Islamist Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), led before his death in February 2011 by Necmettin Erbakan, rather than with the AKP, although Prime Minister Erdoğan clearly shared the primary aim of the IHH to end the Israeli blockade of Gaza. In late May 2011, the cruise liner Mavi Marmara ('Blue Marmara'), which the IHH had acquired, led a flotilla of five smaller cargo ships loaded with 10,000 tons of supplies and around 700 passengers from many countries, aiming to break the blockade. Prior to their departure, Ahmet Davutoğlu urged the leader of the IHH, Bülent Yıldırım, not to sail to Gaza, and the organization apparently promised that if it were challenged by the Israelis, it would re-route to the Egyptian port of al-Arish. In the early hours of 31 May, in international waters 130 kilometers from the Israeli coast, the Israeli navy demanded that the flotilla change course for the Israeli port of Ashdod, but this was refused. The flotilla was surrounded by Israeli fast boats and helicopters, which quickly seized the five smaller ships and then boarded the Mavi Marmara. The so-called Gaza Freedom Flotilla was organized by the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation to deliver supplies to Gaza under the Israeli-Egyptian blockade. Israeli forces hijacked the Mavi Marmara, one of the ships, in international waters on the night of 30–31 May 2010. Nine activists resisting the commandoes were killed, and a tenth died later from the injuries sustained. Dozens more were wounded. See BBC Türkçe. (2011, Eylül). *Türkiye'den İsrail'e Mavi Marmara tepkisi*. [https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2011/09/110902\\_turkey\\_israel](https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2011/09/110902_turkey_israel).

<sup>102</sup> Kirişçi, K. (with Brookings Institution). (2018). *Turkey and the West: Fault lines in a troubled alliance*. Brookings Institution Press, 158–59.

<sup>103</sup> Known as Hizmet (Service), the Gülen movement is an Islamist fraternal movement that emerged from Turkey in the late 1950s and has since expanded to over 180 countries. While details of its origins and role in Turkish will be provided later in this dissertation, it is worth mentioning that the movement went from being an ally of the AKP to being a source of power contention in the early 2010s and "an internal enemy of the state" after the 2016 failed coup. Further analysis will be provided later. See White, 2005.

#### 6.1.4. The European Union, the Cyprus Issue, and Other Areas of Interest

In the first decade of the 2000s, no issue received more attention than Turkey-EU relations among researchers, academia, and the general public interested in Turkish political dynamics. Whether it was due to an excessive hype or to a justified hope for better developments, what seems to find everyone on the same page is the fact that there has been a cyclical relationship between Turkey and the EU, with marked ebbs and flows in the integration process and crucial interactions with Turkey's domestic politics.<sup>104</sup> As mentioned earlier, Turkey had already begun its "harmonization" process with the Ecevit government in 2001. However, it was with the AKP administration in power that the government "received its reward in October 2005" when the accession negotiations were officially inaugurated, giving birth to "the golden age" of Turkey's Europeanization process.<sup>105</sup>

Although subject to many nuanced definitions, Europeanization can be generally defined as the influence (material or ideational) of the EU on other states' policies.<sup>106</sup> Radaelli's description of Europeanization encompasses both concrete and abstract dimensions of this phenomenon, defining it as processes of constructing, diffusing, and institutionalizing formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, practices, and shared beliefs and norms.<sup>107</sup> These elements are initially established and solidified within the EU policy framework and are subsequently integrated into the discourse, political structures, and public policies at the national and sub-national levels.<sup>108</sup> Scholars examining Europeanization in the context of foreign and security policies consistently highlight the EU's impact on shaping identities, norms, and methods of thinking and governance.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, a key indicator of Europeanization is the EU's role in influencing and transforming the cognitive realm, including the beliefs and expectations of political actors.<sup>110</sup> This conceptualization of Europeanization also positions it as a form of geopolitical vision that guides the foreign policies of both EU member states and candidate countries.

Indeed, between its coming into power in 2002 and the opening of EU accession negotiations in 2005, the AKP government pursued Europeanization in its economic and political reforms, which also had a high impact on foreign policy. Certainly, as it will be examined in the following internal

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<sup>104</sup> Narbone, L., & Tocci, N. (2009). Running Around in Circles? The Cyclical Relationship between Turkey and the European Union. In S. Verney & K. Ifantis (Eds.), *Turkey's road to European Union membership: National identity and political change*. Routledge, 21.

<sup>105</sup> Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Featherstone, K., & Radaelli, C. M. (Eds.). (2003). *The Politics of Europeanization* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press Oxford, 3.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>108</sup> Idem.

<sup>109</sup> Tonra, B. (2018). The Europeanisation of National Foreign Policy: Dutch, Danish and Irish Foreign Policy in the European Union (1st ed.). Routledge; Rieker, P. (2009). Europeanization of national security identity: The EU and the changing security identities of the Nordic states. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>110</sup> Knill, C., & Lehmkuhl, D. (2002). How Europe Matters. Different Mechanisms of Europeanization. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

level section, Europeanization was also crucial because it helped legitimize the AKP government both domestically and internationally, serving as “a buffer from the distrust and opposition of the secular establishment.”<sup>111</sup> However, for what concerns the external level of such a process, some scholars raise the point of a “Europeanisation of Turkish foreign policy,” referring to the adoption of an EU-like style in the pursuit of national interests. As Müftüler-Baç and Gürsoy<sup>112</sup> note, rather than using hard power, the EU’s typical approach is based on diplomatic and economic tools to achieve its foreign policy goals. According to this understanding, Turkey’s increasingly active policies in the early 2000s – epitomized by the normalization process under the label of the zero problems with neighbors doctrine discussed above – seemed to reflect a changing approach to carrying out foreign policy based on “political dialogue, economic interdependence, and cultural coexistence, as seen in a case where it would be least expected.”<sup>113</sup> A conversation with a leading expert on the matter of Turkey’s soft and hard power policies appeared to confirm such a view:

Many Europeans at the time increasingly observed that Turkey was acting more like a European country in the Middle East, rather than a Middle Eastern country in Europe. Just as the EU had contributed to peace and stability in Central and Eastern Europe through its enlargement process, Turkey sought to contribute to regional stability in the Middle East by projecting European norms of international relations onto the area. Turkey worked to help transform the region into a more stable and secure place by adopting a European approach. The fact that Turkey and most EU members shared similar interests regarding critical issues in the Middle East also enhanced Turkey’s attractiveness in the eyes of Europeans. Turkey and the EU held similar viewpoints on issues such as Iraq’s future, Iran’s nuclear policies, the transformation of the Middle East, and the Palestinian-Israeli dispute.<sup>114</sup>

According to Aydın and Açıkmüşe,<sup>115</sup> TFP underwent significant changes due to the EU’s conditionality during this period in three distinct ways. First, Turkey was subject to conditionality through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) acquis, which required Turkey to adopt and implement EU policies, including joint actions, common positions, declarations, conclusions, and other EU measures, particularly those related to counterterrorism. Second, conditionality was enforced through political criteria that Turkey needed to meet to begin negotiations as a candidate country in fields such as human rights, market regulations, and civil-military relations in policy making.<sup>116</sup> Third, the EU imposed conditionality requiring the peaceful resolution of disputes between candidate countries and their neighbors as a prerequisite for membership. The efforts in the rapprochement between Greece and Turkey during this time can be attributed to this form of

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<sup>111</sup> Goff-Taylor, M. (2017). The Shifting Drivers of the AKP’s EU Policy. *Wilson Center Middle East Program*, 3.

<sup>112</sup> Müftüler-Baç & Gürsoy, 2010, 409-410.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>114</sup> Interview.

<sup>115</sup> Aydın, M., & Akgül-Açıkmüşe, S. (2007). Europeanization through EU conditionality: Understanding the new era in Turkish foreign policy. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 9(3), 263–274.

<sup>116</sup> The details will be examined later.



conditionality, as the EU's progress reports on Turkey and Accession Partnership documents emphasized the necessity of resolving disputes with Greece as part of the accession process.

Indeed, despite an apparent initial honeymoon, the Cyprus issue remained the main obstacle to Turkey's EU accession.<sup>117</sup> By 2002, efforts to resolve the long-standing question intensified, leading to the development of the Annan Plan, which aimed to reunify the island. Although negotiations were often interrupted, the prospect of Cyprus joining the EU added urgency to these efforts. This eventuality met internal opposition from Turkey's military and nationalist factions, but Erdoğan's government supported the Annan Plan and agreed to submit it to a referendum on April 24, 2004. While a significant majority in Northern Cyprus approved it, it was overwhelmingly rejected in the Southern part, where the primary concern was the plan's allowance for Turkish troops to remain on the island. As a result, Cyprus joined the EU on May 1, 2004, as a divided entity, bringing the problem to the forefront of Turkey's EU negotiations. This became immediately evident when the Greek Cypriot President, Tassos Papadopoulos, threatened to veto Turkey's EU accession process unless Ankara recognized the Greek Cypriot government as the sole sovereign authority on the island. Although Greece, adhering to its 1999 policy that Turkey's inclusion in the EU would enhance regional stability, helped mitigate these threats, tensions remained high. The European Council meeting in December 2004 in Brussels decided that Turkey could begin accession negotiations on October 3, 2005, provided it signed an additional protocol to the 1995 Customs Union agreement, extending it to the new EU member states, including Cyprus. Turkey signed this protocol in July 2005 while explicitly stating that this did not equate to recognizing the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>118</sup>

Yet, as negotiations began, they were complicated by various EU stipulations, including potential permanent restrictions on the freedom of movement and access to EU structural and agricultural funds for new members, as well as the ambiguous notion of the EU's "absorption capacity."<sup>119</sup> This vague criterion raised doubts in Ankara about the EU's genuine commitment to Turkey's membership. The British government's support during its EU Presidency in the latter half of 2005 was crucial in overcoming last-minute objections from Cyprus and Austria, allowing the negotiations to start. However, progress was slow, with only one chapter on science and research completed by June 2006. Meanwhile, the election of Mehmet Ali Talât, a supporter of reunification, as President in Northern Cyprus in 2005 and Demetris Christofis in Southern Cyprus in 2008 rekindled hopes for a settlement. Restrictions on crossing the Green Line were eased, indicating a thaw in relations. However, these

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<sup>117</sup> Ulusoy, 2016.

<sup>118</sup> Acikmese, S. A., & Triantaphyllou, D. (2012). The NATO–EU–Turkey trilogy: The impact of the Cyprus conundrum. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 12(4), 555–573.

<sup>119</sup> Müftüler-Baç & Gürsoy, 2010.

efforts were derailed when the Turkish nationalist Derviş Eroğlu was elected in 2010, and disputes over gas and oil exploration rights in the Eastern Mediterranean further escalated tensions between Turkey, Cyprus, and Israel. Turkey's claims over parts of the contested area and threats of military intervention, compounded by deteriorating Turkish-Israeli relations, exacerbated the situation.<sup>120</sup>

Despite Turkey's initial investment in the Annan Plan and its broader EU accession efforts, the relationship remained fraught with challenges. The collapse of reunification efforts, ongoing territorial disputes, and the increasingly complex dynamics between Turkey, Cyprus, and the broader EU community led to a stagnation in Turkey's EU accession process. Internal EU dynamics, including rising nationalist sentiments and concerns over immigration, made the prospect of Turkish accession increasingly contentious, further complicating the strained relations. Since the very beginning, this was a bitter pillow for Turkey to swallow. When Ankara refused to allow Cypriot planes and ships access to its ports, the EU deemed Turkey's actions unacceptable and suspended negotiations on eight of the 35 chapters of the *acquis*.<sup>121</sup> Although negotiations on other chapters continued, they progressed significantly slower than other candidate countries. In addition, Turkey's discontent grew when Bulgaria and Romania, despite being less advanced economically and administratively, were admitted to the EU in 2007. After that, the European Commission's annual reports on Turkey became increasingly critical on issues like press freedom, judicial independence, and minority rights. Attempts to revive the negotiation process were unsuccessful, particularly when Cyprus held the EU Presidency for six months in 2012, during which Turkey suspended all talks. For others, a deeper reason for the stalled negotiations, which initially began with strong enthusiasm in 2005, was the rapid decline in motivation on both sides. Indeed, Turkey's strained relations with the EU was also due the ambiguous approach from Brussels.

The challenges in the Turkey-EU accession process can be attributed to failures on both sides. The EU entered negotiations without a clear consensus on the ultimate goal, reflecting a triumph of faith in diplomatic procedure over concrete outcomes. There was no unified vision among member states regarding whether the endgame should be full membership for Turkey or some form of privileged partnership. This lack of agreement extended even within individual governments, further complicating the negotiation process.<sup>122</sup>

In Europe, the rise of nationalist and populist parties in countries like Austria, Hungary, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France led to growing resistance to further EU integration and expansion. The financial and economic crises that hit Europe from late 2008 onwards only

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<sup>120</sup> Acikmese & Triantaphyllou, 2012.

<sup>121</sup> Soler I Lecha, 2023; Alpan, 2014, 2016.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with former Turkish diplomat to the EU.

strengthened support for these parties: increasing unemployment and growing opposition to immigration, combined with rising fears of Islam since the 9/11 attacks, made Turkey's accession increasingly contentious. While some European governments officially maintained their support for Turkey's candidacy, the general feeling was that "they were increasingly inclined to delay the process indefinitely."<sup>123</sup> Negative messages, including the then French President Sarkozy's remarks that Turkey was not European and German Chancellor Merkel's position that the EU should engage in a privileged partnership with Turkey rather than directly accepting it as a member, decreased Turkey's enthusiasm for EU-induced reforms.<sup>124</sup> In the mid-2000s, Erdoğan frequently asserted that if the EU were to close its doors to Turkey, the country would pursue the "Ankara Criteria" in place of the "Copenhagen Criteria," implying that Turkey would continue to democratize and achieve prosperity independently of Europe.<sup>125</sup> However, it became evident that the EU was a necessary condition for these reforms, not merely an optional catalyst. As Europe's influence waned towards the end of the 2000s, the AKP's commitment to reform began to diminish. This inward shift was accompanied by a growing focus on strengthening ties with neighboring regions, including the Middle East, the Balkans, and post-Soviet Eurasia. "Shunned by Brussels, or rather by Paris and Berlin, Turkey reimagined itself as a regional hub as well as a player in its own right, rather than a supplicant forever stuck at the gates of the EU."<sup>126</sup>

This seemed to recall the words of Congressman Robert Wexler, co-chair of the Friendship Group with Turkey, who, as early as 2003, declared that the US watched with concern Turkey's engagement with Iran and Syria, "I can say that we were shocked by Turkey's dialogue with Syria and Iran. We wondered if Turkey was changing axis."<sup>127</sup> While this sharp deterioration of mutual trust with its traditional Western allies was hardly compatible with a literal interpretation of the "zero problems with neighbors" policy, there was a factor of consistency with the real heart of the TFP doctrine of the time: the idea of Turkey as a "central power" capable of fulfilling its growing

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with former Turkish official in charge of EU affairs.

<sup>124</sup> Eralp, A., & Torun, Z. (2013). Europeanisation of Turkish politics and policies: Past, present and future. In B. Akçay & B. Yılmaz (Eds.), *Turkey's accession to the European Union: Political and economic challenges*. Lexington Books, 31-35.

<sup>125</sup> This was reiterated also in recent times on Erdoğan's X account: "We kept every promise we made to the European Union, but they kept almost none of the promises they made to us. As Türkiye, we can turn the Copenhagen Criteria into the Ankara Criteria if necessary when it comes to democracy, justice and freedoms, and continue on our way. Even though the administrations changed, there was no change in the unfair and biased attitude of the European Union towards our country, which is incompatible with the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*. They have committed injustice upon injustice against our country with an approach that disregards the principles, rules, and processes they have laid out on paper. As Türkiye, we do not have any expectations from the European Union, at whose door we have been kept waiting for 60 years." See Erdoğan, R. T. (2021, October 1). *Biz Avrupa Birliği'ne verdiğimiz...* X. <https://x.com/RErdogan/status/1708512126300475667>.

<sup>126</sup> Bechev, 2022, 163.

<sup>127</sup> Oran, B. (2012). Proactive Policy with Many Hunches on the Back. In K. Öktem, A. Kadioğlu, & M. Karlı (Eds.), *Another empire? A decade of Turkey's foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party* (1. ed). İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, xv. It reports, "Wexler was speaking to Cumhuriyet, the former flagship of the one-party state and beacon of secularism. But unlike Erbakan's overtures "to Iran in 1996, this time around, there was wider acceptance in Turkey of cooperation with Tehran."

ambitions, maintaining its strategic connector role but no longer dictated by monolithic deployments and purely military criteria.

For instance, this explains the AKP's policies towards the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. In countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia, Turkish penetration occurred in economic and infrastructural fields. At the same time, the presence of important Muslim components favored substantial investments, especially in the religious-cultural arena, which was directed at showing other faces of Turkey's soft power. Building on Özal's legacy, TİKA had delivered development assistance,<sup>128</sup> while the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) engaged in training imams and funding local Islamic communities – in part to counter the influence of the Gulf.<sup>129</sup> The Yunus Emre Institute opened 15 of its 56 branches in the Balkans.<sup>130</sup> The Anadolu Agency started transmitting news in Bosnian and Macedonian and the Turkish Radio Television (TRT) channel for Central Asia and the Balkans began broadcasting in Bosnian and Albanian. As elsewhere, the AKP inherited a network of connections which positioned Turkey in the midst of Balkan politics and economic life. For instance, Turkey signed a free trade agreement with Bosnia Herzegovina in 2002, Albania in 2006, Serbia in 2009, and Montenegro in 2008.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, just as the EU-Turkey Customs Union facilitated commercial ties, NATO provided a platform for security cooperation. Turkish Armed Forces collaborated with Balkan militaries, with Romania and Bulgaria joining the alliance in 2004 and Albania and Croatia five years later.<sup>132</sup> Turkey became increasingly involved in the Balkans as a mediator, particularly focusing on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ankara stepped in after years of unsuccessful attempts by the EU and the US to resolve the institutional deadlock established under the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords. Minister Davutoğlu initiated meetings with the Foreign Ministers of Serbia and Bosnia, resulting in some positive outcomes. Notably, in March 2010, the Serbian Parliament condemned the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, marking a significant acknowledgment of past atrocities.<sup>133</sup> However, despite these diplomatic efforts, Turkey's mediation failed to achieve a breakthrough in resolving Bosnia's internal political issues, particularly because it did not engage with Republika Srpska, the Serb-majority entity.<sup>134</sup> In contrast, Turkey's efforts in the

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<sup>128</sup> Notable among TİKA's activities were numerous restorations of Ottoman-era buildings and mosques. See TİKA. (2018). *Faaliyet raporu*. <https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/2019/Faaliyet%20Raporu%202018/TikaFaaliyetWeb.pdf>.

<sup>129</sup> The Diyanet convened Eurasian Islamic Summit meetings, bringing together Islamic leaders not only from Eurasia but also from the Balkans. In addition, the Diyanet has organized annual Summits of Balkan Muslim Leaders since 2007. Öztürk, A. E., & Gözaydın, İ. (2018). A Frame for Turkey's Foreign Policy via the Diyanet in the Balkans. *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 7(3), 331–350.

<sup>130</sup> Yunus Emre Enstitüsü. (2017). *2017 Faaliyet Raporu*. <https://www.yee.org.tr/tr/yayin/2017-faaliyet-raporu>.

<sup>131</sup> See the dataset, T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı. (n.d.). *Yürürlükte bulunan STA'lar*. <https://www.ticaret.gov.tr/dis-iliskiler/serbest-ticaret-anlasmalari/yururlukte-bulunan-stalar>.

<sup>132</sup> Bechev, 2022b.

<sup>133</sup> Additionally, Serbia and Bosnia exchanged ambassadors after prolonged delays, a development for which Davutoğlu claimed credit.

<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, Turkey's support for Haris Silajdić, a Muslim Bosniak politician who advocated for the abolition of Republika Srpska, backfired when Silajdić lost the 2010 presidential election to Bakir Izetbegović. This allowed Republika Srpska's leader, Milorad

Balkans did see success in its relations with Serbia. Historically on opposite sides during the wars of the 1990s, Turkey and Serbia began to forge stronger ties, highlighted by President Abdullah Gül's visit to Belgrade in October 2009 – the first visit by a Turkish leader since 1986. This was reciprocated by Serbian President Boris Tadić, and in 2010, Gül hosted a summit with Serbia and Bosnia. Serbia viewed Turkey as a valuable economic partner, and a free trade agreement signed in June 2009 bolstered economic ties, Turkish cultural influence also grew, as evidenced by the popularity of the Turkish TV series like “The Magnificent Century” in Serbia.<sup>135</sup> However, despite these initiatives, “Turkey did not offer an alternative to EU membership for Balkan countries. Instead, regional nations engaged with Turkey as an economic and diplomatic partner, complementing their relations with the West.”<sup>136</sup> Despite Turkey's aspirations to be seen as a rising power on par with the EU and the US, it still lagged behind in terms of resources and influence. Moreover, on key issues such as the Kosovo dispute, NATO enlargement, and EU expansion into the Balkans, Turkey largely aligned with Western positions, in contrast to Russia, which often played a spoiler role.<sup>137</sup> As a Bosnian MP stated,

while Davutoğlu's policies were influenced by a sense of historical nostalgia, the response from the Balkans was more pragmatic. Many words came from Ankara, but at some point Balkan people were asking for money to pursue their domestic policies. Not just a new form of dependence on another external power.<sup>138</sup>

On the Caucasian and Central Asian side, Ankara's primary goal was initiatives such as the Platform for Stability and Cooperation in the Caucasus (PSCC) to cross the area's conflicts<sup>139</sup> through high economic-energy integration and, consequently, creating stable corridors – such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline – first to benefit Turkey itself as a transcontinental hub. While relations with “brother” Azerbaijan and the appeal to pan-Turkism did not represent entirely new elements compared to the 1990s, the opening to Armenia was significant. In September 2008, President Abdullah Gül and Foreign Minister Ali Babacan visited Yerevan to attend a World Cup qualifying football match between Turkey and Armenia. Despite

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Dodik, to strengthen his ties with Russia, which positioned itself as the protector of Orthodox Slavs in the region. See Huskić, A., & Fırat Büyük, H. (2022). Measuring Turkey's contemporary influence in Bosnia And Herzegovina: Myth and reality. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 22(1), 121–144.

<sup>135</sup> See Ekinci, M. U. (2019). Turkey's Balkans Policy and Its Skeptics. *Insight Turkey*, 21(2), 37–49.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with former diplomat and journalist from the Balkans.

<sup>137</sup> Bechev, 2012. For a general study of Turkish policy in the region, see Öztürk, 2020.

<sup>138</sup> Interview.

<sup>139</sup> Turkey's cooperation with Georgia and Azerbaijan helped it to counterbalance Russia's influence in the South Caucasus. For Azerbaijan and even more for Georgia – which was invested by the colorful revolution in 2008 – ties with Turkey provided a necessary safeguard against Russian dominance. However, despite Turkey's efforts, Russia maintained a stronger influence in the region. Moscow demonstrated its power and willingness to engage in regional conflicts, particularly during the 2008 war with Georgia, using a combination of military force, trade embargos, political pressure, and information warfare to assert its dominance.

Armenian fans booing the Turkish national anthem, this “football diplomacy” offered a rare opportunity to break the longstanding political deadlock between the two countries.<sup>140</sup> As such the “zero problems” approach in TFP, bolstered by informal trade and labor migration from Armenia to Istanbul, created a conducive environment for engagement. This move towards normalization was aligned with the broader lifting of taboos surrounding the *Meds Yeghern* (“the Great Crime,” as Armenians refer to the massacres and deportations during World War I). Although the AKP government resisted officially recognizing these events as “genocide,” the democratization process and expanded freedom of speech in Turkey allowed intellectuals and commentators to freely use the term and commemorate 24 April as Armenian Genocide Day.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, the “Armenian Opening,” initiated by Gül, reached its peak on October 10, 2009, when Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and his Armenian counterpart Eduard Nalbandyan signed accords in Zurich to lift the border blockade and establish diplomatic relations.<sup>142</sup> While the presence of Russian representatives underscored the geopolitical significance of the event, normalization with Turkey had the potential to reduce Armenia's dependency on Moscow, signaling Yerevan's desire to distance itself from Russian influence.<sup>143</sup> However, the optimism surrounding this initiative was short-lived. The “Armenian Opening” ultimately faltered, highlighting the significant obstacles to Turkey’s regional activism. Key spoilers included domestic opposition, resistance from Azerbaijan, and hesitance within Turkey’s own leadership, particularly from Prime Minister Erdoğan, who did not want to alienate its expanding electorate.

Some observers even made the point that the nature of Turkey-Russia relations had transformed from geopolitical rivalry to geoeconomic cooperation.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the volume of Turkish trade with Russia has quadrupled over the last decade, and there were numerous meetings between Vladimir Putin and Erdogan in 2005. An additional factor driving Russia and Turkey closer emanates from the ambiguities that each experienced in their relations with the West. The imperial tone of American undertakings in the region brought the two closer in the strategic sense of countering the West’s influence in their backyards. In addition, the EU’s ambivalent attitude towards Turkey following the

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<sup>140</sup> The border between Turkey and Armenia had been closed since 1993 as a punitive measure in response to Armenia's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. See Alaranta & Silvan, 2022; Gürlü, R. T. (2013). *Turkey's Soft Power towards Central Asian Countries after the Cold War*. 1(2), 100–113; Zeeshan Fida. (2018). Central Asia's Place in Turkey's Foreign Policy. *Policy Perspectives: The Journal of the Institute of Policy Studies*, 15(1).

<sup>141</sup> The 2007 assassination of Hrant Dink, a prominent Turkish-Armenian journalist and advocate for reconciliation, also galvanized civil society in support of peace initiatives.

<sup>142</sup> The signing was witnessed by key international figures, including Hillary Clinton, Sergey Lavrov, and Bernard Kouchner, representing the U.S., Russia, and France, respectively, and co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group on Karabakh.

<sup>143</sup> An Armenian expert quoted in Hill, F., Kirişci, K., & Moffatt, A. (2015). Armenia and Turkey: From Normalization to Reconciliation. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 13(4), 135.

<sup>144</sup> Moustakis, F., & Ackerman, E. (2002). September 11: A Dynamic for Russo-Turkish Co-operation or Conflict? *Central Asian Survey*, 21(4), 423–434.

Constitutional debacle might have prompted Turkey to seek closer ties with Russia, a country that also felt aggrieved by equivocal European attitudes.<sup>145</sup> Among the emerging global powers, China held significant importance for Turkey, particularly in the economic sphere. As China rose as a major industrial power, trade between the two nations expanded rapidly, growing from just \$621 million in 1996 to nearly \$19.5 billion by 2010. However, this relationship was not without challenges, as Turkey found itself balancing its support for the Uighurs, a fellow Turkic ethnic group, with the pragmatic need to maintain strong ties with Beijing. This delicate balance was vividly illustrated in June 2009, when President Abdullah Gül embarked on a six-day visit to China, advocating for closer cooperation and concluding his visit in Xinjiang, where he referred to the Uighurs as a "friendship bridge" between Turkey and China. However, less than a week after Gül's visit, riots erupted in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, between Uighurs and Han Chinese immigrants. The Chinese government's violent suppression of the unrest resulted in over 150 deaths and 800 injuries. In response, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan condemned the Chinese actions as an "atrocious" and even labeled them as "genocide." Abdullah Gül called for a transparent investigation into the events, while protests in Istanbul, involving around 10,000 people, demanded Turkish intervention and a boycott of Chinese goods. Despite these tensions, the Chinese government appeared eager to move past the incident. A senior official from China's foreign ministry expressed a desire to improve relations with Turkey, and the authorities in Xinjiang seemed to shift their approach by adopting softer tactics and allocating additional funds for the province's development. By October 2010, when Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited Turkey, relations between the two countries appeared to have improved significantly. Both sides emphasized the need for increased economic collaboration and even discussed the potential for "strategic cooperation," though the specifics of this cooperation remained undefined.

However, the most surprising innovation in TFP during this period was its strategic outreach to Africa and Latin America. Alongside the establishment of numerous embassies in these regions, Turkey particularly focused on sub-Saharan Africa and Muslim-majority African states, where it implemented strategies to expand its influence. The designation of 2005 as the "Year of Africa" marked the beginning of a series of bilateral and multilateral cooperation initiatives<sup>146</sup>, culminating in Turkey securing an observer seat in the African Union and gaining entry into the African Development Bank. Additionally, Turkey's influence extended through cultural and humanitarian channels, notably supported by the networks of Fetullah Gülen's brotherhoods and Koranic schools,

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<sup>145</sup> Hill, F., & Taşpınar, Ö. (2006). Russia and Turkey in the Caucasus: Moving Together to Preserve the Status Quo? *Brookings*,

<sup>146</sup> To promote its cause, it hosted a "Turkey-African Cooperation Summit" with the heads of state and other senior representatives from 50 African states in Istanbul in August 2008.

which were strong allies of Erdoğan then. The African dimension of Turkey's foreign policy was a clear reflection of the broader global vision promoted by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who articulated in 2009,

By 2023, when the country will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Republic, I envision a Turkey that is a full member of the EU after having completed all the necessary requirements, living in full peace with its neighbors, economically integrated with neighboring regions, sharing a common security vision, playing an effective role in establishing order in areas where our national interests are at stake, and actively participating in global affairs as one of the top ten economies in the world.

Statements of this kind, with the benefit of hindsight, probably constitute the symbolic culmination of the degree of trust and success reposed by and in Turkey toward a foreign policy that seemed indeed likely to set a lasting new course. However, the weaving elaborated by the Erdoğan-Davutoğlu duo showed its fragility in the face of the watershed period represented by external shocks such as the so-called “Arab uprisings” in 2011 and alterations in Turkey’s external level with an increasing process of authoritarianization. However, let aside the contradiction and overambitious points of TFP at the time, it would be incorrect to overlook the pragmatic side and results that prompted Turkish policymakers to conduct the country in such a direction.

### **6.1.5. External Projection Parameters**

#### ***6.1.5.1. The AKP’s Successful Economic Receipt***

The first decade of the 2000s represented a transformative period for Turkey, characterized by significant economic growth and a redefined role in global affairs. Under the leadership of the AKP, the country underwent a profound economic restructuring that laid the foundation for its ambitious foreign policy. The turnaround began after the 2001 domestic financial crisis, which devastated the Turkish economy. The foundational basis for the success of the AKP’s economic receipt was certainly a comprehensive restructuring program backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Among everyone, Kemal Derviş, the Minister of State for Economic Affairs in Turkey during the last Ecevit government (2001) is credited with being the architect of Turkey's successful three-year economic recovery program launched in that year, which set the stage for recovery, resulting in robust growth, reduced inflation, and a more stable fiscal environment. Indeed, by 2007, Turkey's economy was expanding at an impressive average annual growth rate of 6.9%, and inflation had plummeted from over 70% in the early 2000s to just 9.3% by 2004. This was accompanied by a stabilization of the Turkish lira, culminating in a currency redenomination in 2005 that removed six



zeros from the lira, “marking a psychological break from the hyperinflationary past.” The economic transformation was also marked by a significant shift in Turkey's industrial structure, with manufacturing and services becoming dominant sectors while agriculture's contribution dwindled. By 2010, manufacturing accounted for just under 20% of GDP, while services comprised 72.6% and agriculture less than 8%. Manufactured goods, including textiles, clothing, base metals, and motor vehicles, dominated exports, constituting over 90% of Turkey's export portfolio. The country's exports quadrupled between 2000 and 2008, reaching \$132 billion, with key markets including the European Union, Russia, and the Gulf states. Notable export items included textiles and clothing, which reached \$21.6 billion, base metals at \$14.5 billion, and motor vehicles at \$14.8 billion, showcasing the country's industrial capabilities. Foreign direct investment (FDI) played a crucial role in Turkey's economic resurgence. FDI inflows soared from \$1 billion in 2002 to a peak of \$19.9 billion in 2007, reflecting growing global confidence in Turkey's economic potential. This influx of capital was pivotal not only in financing the current account deficit but also in modernizing key sectors such as banking, telecommunications, and energy. High-profile privatizations, such as the sale of Türk Telekom to a Lebanese consortium led by the Hariri family for \$6.5 billion in 2005, underscored the appeal of Turkish assets to foreign investors. European banks like Unicredit, BNP Paribas, Fortisbank, and Dexia made significant investments in Turkey's banking sector, further integrating the country into the global financial system. By 2010, the cumulative size of portfolio investments had risen to \$100 billion, illustrating Turkey's deepening integration into the global economy.<sup>147</sup>

Turkey's economic success in the 2000s profoundly affected its foreign policy, which became increasingly assertive and multifaceted. The AKP government, under the economic stewardship of figures like Economy Ministers Ali Babacan and Mehmet Şimşek, leveraged the country's economic dynamism to enhance its soft power and expand its influence in the region. According to many experts in the field at that time, three main factors contributed to this rise. The first notable trend was that the dispersion of power within the international political economy was not matched by a corresponding reallocation of power to a single dominant actor. While it became evident that the United States no longer exemplified the traditional notion of hegemony – lacking the unilateral capacity to shape global political and economic structures as it once did – the power shift away from the U.S. had not resulted in a consolidation of power by another potential hegemon.<sup>148</sup> Instead, this transition was

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<sup>147</sup> For an overview of the Turkish economy in the 2000s, see Öniş, Z., & Şenses, F. (Eds.). (2013). *Turkey and the global economy: Neo-liberal restructuring and integration in the post-crisis era*. Routledge.

<sup>148</sup> Walt, S. M. (2011). The End of the American Era. *The National Interest*, 116(116), 6–16; Beckley, M. (2011). China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure. *International Security*, 36(3), 41–78; Kupchan, C. A. (2012). *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn*. Oxford University Press; Zakaria, F. (2009). *The post-American world* (1. publ. als Norton

occurring in a more dispersed manner, involving a range of emerging challengers. Closely related to this was the second significant development: the growing trend towards regionalization in the global political economy. The globalization wave of the preceding three decades triggered a new phase of regionalization, leading to the formation of autonomous regional security orders.<sup>149</sup> The third development involved the emergence of new regional powers and “catch-up states.”<sup>150</sup> The ongoing reshuffling of the global order and the uncertainty arising from the diminishing hegemonic checks and balances granted regional powers greater autonomy in their domestic and foreign policies. This complex interplay of developments had created a political economy environment where regional powers enjoyed more freedom to pursue their own regional agendas and adopt more assertive foreign policy strategies, rather than merely conforming to roles traditionally assigned to them by major powers. The rise of BRICs and near-BRICs within regional and international systems exemplified this trend. During this time of global power transitions, a critical question arose regarding the capacity of rising powers to assume increasingly ambitious regional and global roles.

This period saw Turkey rebrand itself as a bridge between East and West, a role facilitated by its economic strength and geographic positioning. One of the most significant areas where economic performance intersected with foreign policy was in the energy sector. Turkey’s growing demand for energy, driven by industrialization and urbanization, made securing reliable energy supplies a top foreign policy priority. Between 2000 and 2010, Turkey’s primary energy consumption rose by 45%, from 76.7 million tons of oil equivalent to nearly 111. Given its limited domestic energy resources, this surge in consumption necessitated increased imports, with natural gas imports alone growing from 14.6 billion cubic meters in 2000 to 39 in 2010. Turkey’s strategic location between energy-rich regions such as the Caspian basin and energy-hungry Europe positioned it as a critical energy corridor. Projects like the Nabucco pipeline, which aimed to transport 31 of gas annually from the Caspian region to Europe via Turkey, underscored Turkey's ambitions to become a key player in the global energy market. Although the Nabucco project faced delays and uncertainties, it highlighted the country’s potential to enhance its geopolitical importance through energy diplomacy. In 2010, Turkey ratified the Intergovernmental Agreement for the Nabucco project, securing €200 million from the European Union as part of the European economic recovery package. It further cemented its role in European energy security. Additionally, the Turkish-Greek pipeline, inaugurated in 2007,

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paperback). Norton. See also a comprehensive special issue of Third World Quarterly on the subject. For the editorial introduction, see also the book of the same editors, Gray, K., & Murphy, C. (2014). *Rising powers and the future of global governance*. Routledge.

<sup>149</sup> Katzenstein, P. J. (2005). *A world of regions: Asia and Europe in the American imperium* (1. publ). Cornell Univ. Press. For a critical review that puts great emphasis on the ‘endogenous construction of regions’, see Acharya, A. (2007). The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics. *World Politics*, 59(4), 629–652.

<sup>150</sup> Buzan & Wæver, 2003.

began transporting Azerbaijani gas to Greece, with plans to extend it to Italy, further solidifying Turkey's role as an energy bridge.

Beyond energy, Ankara's burgeoning trade with non-European countries reflected the shifting global economic scenario. The lifting of UN sanctions on Iraq in 2003 revitalized bilateral trade, making Iraq Turkey's largest trading partner in the Middle East. Similarly, trade with East Asian economies, particularly China, expanded rapidly, with China's share of Turkey's foreign trade rising to 6.5% by 2010. This diversification of trade partners mirrored the global shift in economic power away from traditional Western economies towards emerging markets in Asia and the Middle East. The rise of China as a significant trade partner was emblematic of Turkey's broader strategy to engage with the rapidly growing economies of the East. Despite these successes, Turkey's economic achievements were with limitations. The economy's reliance on foreign capital inflows and the persistent current account deficit, which stood at 6.4% of GDP in 2011, made it vulnerable to external shocks. The 2008 global financial crisis exposed these vulnerabilities, as FDI inflows and exports contracted sharply, leading to a brief recession with GDP declining by 4.7% in 2009. However, Turkey's quick recovery, with GDP growth rebounding to 8.1% in 2010, demonstrated the underlying resilience of its economy. Nonetheless, structural weaknesses in the Turkish economy, such as low domestic savings rates, high levels of foreign debt, and income inequality, persisted and posed ongoing challenges. These vulnerabilities were exacerbated by the political pressures to sustain high growth rates, which often led to an over-reliance on short-term capital inflows and external borrowing. Turkey's continued dependence on foreign capital and its exposure to global market fluctuations meant that its economic foundation, while strong, was not unshakeable. As Öniş and Kutlay sum up,

High degrees of energy dependence and low savings rates, combined with low technological capacity, together constitute the major structural root causes of Turkey's chronic current account deficit. These constraints, in turn, significantly restrict Turkey's foreign policy proactivism since they lead to a kind of asymmetric power relationship with other key actors involved in the region that could be classified as 'coercive regional powers'. For example, the asymmetric balance of power relationship, which is clearly evident in the case of Turkish-Russian and Turkish-Iranian relations, places important restrictions on Turkey in terms of developing independent strategies in key regional conflicts and exerting an even more powerful influence in the direction of democratization and regime transformation in the region.<sup>151</sup>

Thus, while Turkey's economic rise in the 2000s enabled a more dynamic and ambitious foreign policy, it also required careful management to avoid the pitfalls of overreach and ensure long-

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<sup>151</sup> Öniş & Kutlay, 2013, 1416.

term sustainability. The intertwining of economic success with foreign policy ambitions, particularly in areas such as energy security and regional trade, highlighted the opportunities and the risks inherent in Turkey's evolving international role during this period. The involvement of key political figures, multinational corporations, and strategic trade relationships during this transformative decade played a pivotal role in shaping Turkey's assertive global stance. Indeed, while it certainly had the traits of a neo-liberal turn aligned with the Washington consensus, Turkey's changing political economy of the 2000s also had an emphasis on "the regulatory rather than the developmental aspect of state capacity."<sup>152</sup> In this sense, the transformations taking place in the post-crisis global political, economic landscape seemed to have triggered a reshuffling in Turkish policy makers' cognitive mindset, devoted to formulating a proactive industrial strategy that embodied elements of a "neo-developmental turn." Prime Minister Erdoğan, clearly with an implicit agenda of matching and even emulating East Asia's developmental success, openly invited Turkey's top business groups "to produce domestic cars" at one of the meetings of the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSIAD). The Minister of Science, Industry, and Technology similarly shared his ambition to create "Turkey's own Renault, Fiat and Ford."<sup>153</sup> Erdoğan even set an overambitious target for Turkey's industrial transformation strategy: "By 2023, we want Turkey to be one of the top ten economic areas of the world...Over the next 15 years, we want to increase the per capita income from \$10,500 to \$25,000."<sup>154</sup>

#### **6.1.5.2.     *The Rise of Turkey as a Humanitarian Power***

Turkey's significant economic success in the first decade of the 2000s not only transformed its domestic and international outlook in terms of being a credible rising power but also catalyzed another aspect of its multifaceted foreign policy. Indeed, its economic resurgence provided the material capabilities to expand its influence on the global stage through new means. The intertwining of economic growth with foreign policy aspirations was evident as Turkey began to leverage its economic resources to project soft power, particularly through humanitarian diplomacy, which became a defining feature of its international engagement during this period. In 2010, after the Mavi Marmara issue, the then-Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Burak Özügergin maintained

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 1421.

<sup>153</sup> Benmayor, G. (4 February 04). Turkey's dream of a domestic car. *Hürriyet*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/gila-benmayor/turkeys-dream-of-a-domestic-car-40498>.

<sup>154</sup> Erdoğan, R. T. (2012, November 28). Turkish economy meets EU entry criteria. *Huffington Post*. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/recep-tayyiperdogan/the-turkish-economy-meets\\_b\\_2205265.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/recep-tayyiperdogan/the-turkish-economy-meets_b_2205265.html).

We do not look at the Middle East...only through security and stability prisms but also through human rights...Problems can be avoided if this aid package is seen as humanitarian aid. [And] due to its presence in several geocultural spheres (including the Balkans, the Middle East, and Europe), Turkey has no choice but to be innovative and active as a policy leader and globalization visionary.<sup>155</sup>

Under the AKP, Turkey emerged as a prominent example of a new trend, integrating humanitarianism into its foreign policy framework to assert its influence and fulfill its responsibilities on the global stage. Indeed, the concept of humanitarianism underwent a significant transformation after the end of the Cold War, evolving from a focus on immediate relief efforts to a more comprehensive approach that includes addressing the root causes of conflicts by promoting human rights, democracy, and economic development. This broader scope of humanitarianism has been accompanied by increased institutionalization, with the establishment of standardized practices and accountability mechanisms.<sup>156</sup> In this context, states began adopting humanitarian diplomacy to enhance their global standing and influence. In the case of Turkey, “this was not merely a byproduct of its foreign policy but rather a strategic choice that aligned with its ambitions as an emerging global player, an active middle power by actively engaging in humanitarian efforts across the globe.”<sup>157</sup> This approach was designed to showcase Turkey’s soft power, demonstrating its ability to provide solutions and support in times of crisis, thereby enhancing its international credibility and prestige. According to Donelli,

Turkey has used humanitarian diplomacy as a tool to increase its political influence and presence by using persuasion and coercive power. In other words, humanitarian diplomacy has become part of Turkey’s soft power toolkit and diplomatic activities. The empirical analysis of case studies shows how the humanitarian-oriented agenda adopted by Turkey is a diplomatic strategy that allowed it to earn trust and increase its reputation in the field, as well as inside international fora.<sup>158</sup>

Minister Davutoğlu’s articulation of Turkish humanitarian diplomacy in 2013<sup>159</sup> outlined three key dimensions: first, addressing the needs of Turkish citizens abroad through the expansion of consulates and liberal visa policies; second, adopting a human-centered approach in crisis zones, exemplified by Turkey’s humanitarian missions in different parts of the globe; and third, advocating for a more inclusive global humanitarian framework, particularly within the United Nations system. This comprehensive approach allowed Turkey to project itself as both a “compassionate and powerful

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<sup>155</sup> T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı. (2007). *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Sözcüsü Burak Özügergin’in Olağan Basın Toplantısı Metni*. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakanligi-sozcusu-burak-ozugergin\\_in-olagan-basin-toplantisi-metni-27-mayis-2010\\_tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakanligi-sozcusu-burak-ozugergin_in-olagan-basin-toplantisi-metni-27-mayis-2010_tr.mfa).

<sup>156</sup> Barnett, M. (2005). Humanitarianism Transformed. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(04); Barnett, M. N. (2013). *Empire of humanity: A history of humanitarianism* (1. printing). Cornell Univ. Press.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Turkish practitioner in the field.

<sup>158</sup> Donelli, F. (2017). Features, Aims, and Limits of Turkey’s Humanitarian Diplomacy. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 11(3), 59-83, 60.

<sup>159</sup> Davutoğlu, A. (2013). Turkey’s humanitarian diplomacy: Objectives, challenges and prospects. *Nationalities Papers*, 41(6), 865–870.

state” committed to supporting those in need while simultaneously pursuing its broader strategic interests.

Turkey’s humanitarian diplomacy was also marked by the active involvement of a diverse array of actors, including state ministries, quasi-governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, TİKA, and the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) were key state institutions driving Turkey’s international humanitarian efforts. During the AKP era, TİKA expanded its reach globally, reflecting Turkey’s shift “from an aid recipient to a donor country.” AFAD coordinated large-scale international humanitarian operations and domestic fundraising efforts, playing a crucial role in Turkey’s disaster response and aid delivery. Quasi-governmental organizations like the Turkish Red Crescent (*Kızılay*) and the Diyanet further augmented Turkey’s humanitarian capabilities. *Kızılay* was particularly active in delivering aid to countries such as Palestine, Sudan, Indonesia, and Somalia, aligning closely with governmental priorities. The Diyanet, operating under the Presidency of Religious Affairs, extended its humanitarian efforts to crisis-affected regions. Moreover, in line with the AKP’s sociocultural background, specific Turkish NGOs played a significant role in the country’s humanitarian diplomacy, often in regions with significant Muslim populations or in areas of strategic interest to Turkey. Organizations such as the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, Cansuyu Foundation, and Doctors Worldwide Turkey became key players in delivering aid and supporting development in crisis zones.<sup>160</sup> Turkey’s humanitarian diplomacy also had a clear economic dimension intertwined with its broader foreign policy objectives. As Turkey’s economy grew, so did its capacity to engage in international development and humanitarian efforts. This involvement not only helped address immediate crises but also supported Turkey’s long-term goal of contributing to global stability and peace. Economic development activities were central to this strategy, as they were seen as essential for reducing violence and promoting human security. Turkey’s contributions to the UN World Food Program and its active participation in peacekeeping missions across various regions further solidified its role as a key humanitarian actor.<sup>161</sup> By providing aid and engaging in development projects, Turkey built strong relationships with countries in these regions, which in turn supported its growing commercial interests. As noted by Gilley, “the so-called emerging powers”,

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<sup>160</sup> For an overview, see Şeyşane, V., & Tanrıverdi, G. (2022). States as “Humanitarians”: The Turkish Brand of Humanitarian Diplomacy. *Marmara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilimler Dergisi*, 10(1), 153–178. For the specific case, see Çelik, N., & İşeri, E. (2016). Islamically oriented humanitarian NGOs in Turkey: AKP foreign policy parallelism. *Turkish Studies*, 17(3), 429–448.

<sup>161</sup> Sucuoğlu, G., & Sazak, O. (2016). The New Kid on the Block: Turkey’s Shifting Approaches to Peacebuilding. *Rising Powers Quarterly*, 1(2), 69–91. In February 2010, Turkey participated in the UN missions in Lebanon, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, Haiti, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Chad, and the African Union (AU)-UN Hybrid operation in Darfur, with a total of 380 military personnel, 141 police, and one observer.

like Turkey, “make humanitarian assistance a priority because it fits well with their active diplomatic agendas that seek to increase influence through such good international citizenship.”<sup>162</sup>

[...] offering assistance in the wake of a humanitarian crisis provides important opportunities to demonstrate solidarity and to demonstrate material resources. This is particularly important both in regions where Turkey was negatively perceived, such as the Middle East and the Balkans, as well as where it had almost no presence such as Africa. Therefore, Turkish efforts in the humanitarian field resonate with its image as a humanitarian state.<sup>163</sup>

As such, Turkish humanitarian efforts embodied Davutoğlu’s vision of humanitarianism, emphasizing the roles of both state institutions and civil society organizations in executing humanitarian diplomacy through a coordinated, inter-agency policy. This inter-agency cooperation showed a connection to a multidimensional or “multi-track approach,”<sup>164</sup> which began to allow Turkey to operate on various levels and fronts – ranging from formal diplomatic relations within international and regional organizations to transnational connections developed by non-state actors like NGOs, charities, and business associations. The Somalia example stands out as a striking example in this sense. After the disasters that occurred due to drought in 2011, the campaign that Turkey began targeting Somalia led to the revival of economic, political and social relations between the two countries. The visit that Erdogan made to Somalia with a large delegation when he was Prime Minister<sup>165</sup> and when the health and security risks in Somalia had yet to be thwarted, and the amount of aid that Turkey had granted sat on the international agenda. At the time, the government’s vision was that “from this day onwards, the projects and assistance that Turkey put into practice opened the door for the re-structure of Somalia without using force.”<sup>166</sup> In reality, as it would later become clear with the establishment of Turkish military bases in the country, security concerns had always represented a parallel driver in Ankara’s African policies. However, pro-government circles were able to present it as “the humanitarian assistance model that Turkey has pursued in Somalia and across Africa has not been interpreted as soft or hard power but rather as ‘virtuous power.’”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Bruce Gilley (2015), ‘Turkey, Middle Powers, and the New Humanitarian-ism,’ *Perceptions - Journal of International Affairs* 20(1), p.47.

<sup>163</sup> Donelli, F. (2017). Features, Aims and Limits of Turkey’s Humanitarian Diplomacy. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 11(3), 59-83, p. 72.

<sup>164</sup> The term multi-track diplomacy was popularized by Rupesinghe and refers to the contributions of a variety of actors at different levels of a conflict that work together effectively to attain peace. Kumar Rupesinghe (1997), *The general principles of multi-track diplomacy*, Durban: accord

<sup>165</sup> “Başbakan Somali’de”, *Sabah*, 19 August 2011, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/dun-ya/2011/08/19/basbakan-somalide>, (Date of access: 10 July 2017).

<sup>166</sup> Geniş bir analiz için bkz. Mehmet Özkan, *Turkey’s Involvement in Somalia Assesment Of A State-Building in Progress*, (SETA Yayınları, İstanbul: 2014).

<sup>167</sup> Bruce Gilley, “Turkey, Middle Powers, and the New Humanitarianism”, p. 38.

<sup>167</sup> CHAPTER 8 NEITHER REALIST NOR LIBERAL: TURKEY’S FOREIGN AID POLICY DURING THE AK PARTY ERA, VEYSEL KURT\*\*

Yet, after the Arab Uprisings and internal imbalances limited Turkish economic rise, this aspect of TFP's "golden era" also began to suffer a reversal and show the limitation of its global outlook, asking Ankara to direct such efforts in other directions or in different manners.<sup>168</sup>

## 6.2. The Internal Level

### 6.2.1. The AKP's Rise and Accommodation Strategy in the Local-Global Nexus

I want to see Turkey make a meaningful contribution to the mosaic of cultures in Europe. My motto is a local-oriented stance in a globalizing world.<sup>169</sup>

The November 2002 Parliamentary elections represented a "political earthquake" in Turkish political history, as it marked the emergence of a new actor that would leave profound implications for the country's domestic and foreign policy in the following decades.<sup>170</sup> Founded on August 14, 2001, the AKP quickly became a symbol of a newfangled "political experiment" that positioned itself as a viable alternative to the established political parties that had dominated Turkey's political scene for decades. For many, it sought to integrate the Islamic movement into mainstream politics through an unparalleled approach.<sup>171</sup> The election results were remarkable and comparable in magnitude only to the 1950 elections, which ended the CHP's power monopoly. Indeed, the AKP won by a landslide, securing 34.3% of the vote and 363 of the 550 seats in the Grand National Assembly. In addition, none of the ruling parties from the previous government managed to surpass the 10% electoral threshold, leading to their exclusion from Parliament. This victory allowed the AKP to form a single-party government<sup>172</sup>, a feat that had eluded many of its predecessors.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Altunışık, M.B. (2014). Turkey as an 'Emerging Donor' and the Arab Uprisings. *Mediterranean Politics*, 19(3), 333-350.

<sup>169</sup> Full speech, Erdoğan, R. T. (n.d.). *Başbakan Erdoğan, Düşünce Kuruluşu Aei'da Konuştu [Conservative Democracy and the Globalization of Freedom – Speech]*. American Enterprise Institute. <https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/Basin/2004/Ocak/30%20Ocak%202004/BAŞBAKAN%20ERDOĞAN,%20DÜŞÜNCE%20KURULUŞU%20AEI%27DA%20KONUŞTU%20-%201.doc>.

<sup>170</sup> Hale, 2019, 139.

<sup>171</sup> This was predominant in conservative circles but also quite spread also among "Turkish liberals." See Nasr, S. V. R. (2005). The Rise of "Muslim Democracy". *Journal of Democracy*, 16(2), 13-27; Tepe, S. (2005). Turkey's AKP: a model "Muslim-Democratic" party?. *Journal of Democracy*, 16(3), 69-82; Turunc, H. (2007). Islamicist or democratic? The AKP's search for identity in Turkish politics. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 15(1), 79-91; Öniş, Z., & Keyman, E. F. (2003). Turkey at the polls: a new path emerges. *Journal of Democracy*, 14(2), 95-107.

<sup>172</sup> First with Abdullah Gül as Prime Minister and, from March 2003 onwards, under Erdoğan.

<sup>173</sup> For these and other details of domestic politics at the time, see Hale, W. M., & Özbudun, E. (2011). *Islamism, democracy and liberalism in Turkey: The case of the AKP* (1. issued in paperback). Routledge.



Let aside the numbers, it is crucial to discuss also the several factors that contributed to the AKP's spectacular rise. Above all, Turkish people were eager "to punish with a vote of protest" the established political parties, which they held responsible for the deep economic crisis of 2000-2001 and years of political instability and feebleness.<sup>174</sup> The struggles between the army and Islamists, the ANAP and DYP on the right, the CHP and DSP on the left, and the rivalry between President Sezer and Prime Minister Ecevit destroyed public respect for the political establishment. Electoral surveys indicated that the AKP drew its support from a broad spectrum of the electorate.<sup>175</sup> In this sense, the AKP successfully framed itself as the "new hope for fixing Turkey's economic, social, and political problems, resonating deeply with an electorate eager for change."<sup>176</sup> Linked to this voting behavior was also the capacity of the AKP's leadership to ideate a new "political formula" that would make it a "catch-all party" able to appeal to a broader spectrum of the Turkish electorate.<sup>177</sup> According to Zürcher, "the Turks voted for Erdoğan because they believed he could put an end to *yoksulluk* (poverty) and *yolsuzluk* (corruption), not because they wanted an Islamic state."<sup>178</sup> In other words, this was possible because, despite its roots in the Islamist *Milli Görüş* Movement, the AKP carefully crafted a new ideological identity that distanced itself from overt Islamism.<sup>179</sup> Following the closure of Erbakan's RP in 1998 and its re-establishment under the FP sigla, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül emerged as the leaders of a wing known as the "reformists" (*yenilikçiler*), which opposed Erbakan and sought to convert the party to a pro-western, liberal-conservative stance with less strong tinges of Islamism. After an unsuccessful attempt to take over the leadership of the FP at its first national convention in May 2000, Erdoğan and his supporters set up the AKP. The new party abandoned Erbakan's former call for an Islamic order and strongly backed improving human rights and Turkey's bid to join the EU.<sup>180</sup> The initial trajectory of the AKP "in the political field consisted in the movement from Islamist heresy to democratic-conservative heterodoxy."<sup>181</sup> This difference is perfectly explained by Bahri Zengin, a member of the old guard:

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<sup>174</sup> Öniş & Keyman, 2003.

<sup>175</sup> This included former supporters of Erbakan's Islamist tradition as well as voters disillusioned with traditional right-wing parties like ANAP and DYP, and even those from the CHP and MHP.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with a Turkish political strategist.

<sup>177</sup> Giannotta, V. (2019). Il partito AKP: tra conservatorismo e riformismo. *Rivista di politica: trimestrale di studi, analisi e commenti*: 2, 2019, 23-32. See also Baykan, T. S. (2018). *The Justice and Development Party in Turkey: Populism, personalism, organization*. Cambridge University Press; Müftüler-Baç, M., & Keyman, E. F. (2012). *Turkey Under the AKP: The Era of Dominant-Party Politics*. *Journal of Democracy*, 23(1), 85–99.

<sup>178</sup> Zürcher, 2017, 330.

<sup>179</sup> It is worth remembering that all previous parties that adopted the MG's ideological position were perceived as threatening the Republic's secular identity and were banned from politics through military interventions or closed down by Constitutional Court decisions. See Rubin, B. M., & Çarkoğlu, A. (2013). *Religion and Politics in Turkey*. Taylor and Francis

<sup>180</sup> Taşpınar, Ö. (2012). *Turkey: The New Model?* *Brookings*.

<sup>181</sup> D'Alema, 2024, 9.

[T]hey [the reformists] wanted to follow real politics, which meant that we must act according to political restrictions in Turkey. They said that the military, the media and the big industrialists determined the political structure of Turkey and we had to try to get their support.<sup>182</sup>

However, this did not mean that the AKP represented a full-fledged rupture with its predecessors, who interpreted

Islam through a politicized moral perspective that links itself to the Turkish identity and nationalism, diverging from the secular and pro-West Kemalist approach, [and] engage[d] social, economic, and political problems by employing an Islamic language and by offering an Islamic morality as a solution, appealing to the Sunni, conservative Turks from low and middle classes who felt unrepresented by the Kemalist regime.<sup>183</sup>

However, the AKP underwent a successful transformation in Turkish Islamist parties and elaborated discourses that brought support also from the secularists, “especially from those who were impressed by its promises to improve Turkey’s relations with the West.” The party’s ideological shift was encapsulated in the term “conservative democracy” (*muhafazakâr demokrasi*)<sup>184</sup>, which sought to harmonize traditional values with democratic principles akin to the Christian Democrat parties in Europe. To avoid the connotation of “Muslim democrats,” the party picked “conservative” to nod at the Turkish people’s traditions and their continuity, and the word “democrat” to indicate their intentions to transform Turkey’s political system and promote democratization.<sup>185</sup> According to its supporters, the AKP adopted the idea of “conservative democracy” to bridge the gap between the local and the universal and to reconcile its values with democracy.<sup>186</sup> As the initial concept developed by the AKP, “conservative democracy” imagined the political arena as a space for reconciliation. It viewed diversity as a source of richness and identified “the national will” as the source of political authority. Moreover, this approach posited that Turkish politics must rest firmly on the principles of reconciliation, tolerance, and integration – as opposed to confrontation, conflict, and polarization.<sup>187</sup> As the party’s enthusiasts have recently assessed:

The idea of ‘conservative democracy’ made it possible for the AK Party to bring to an end the February 28 process in Turkey. The movement’s inclusive style sought to cleanse the political arena from polarization or, in other words, to facilitate normalization. As such, the main goals of this approach were

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<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Atacan, F. (2005). Explaining Religious Politics at the Crossroad: AKP-SP. *Turkish Studies*, 6(2), 194.

<sup>183</sup> Idem.

<sup>184</sup> The term was introduced by one of the AKP’s ideologues, Yalçın Akdoğan. See Akdoğan, Y. (2004). *AK Parti ve muhafazakâr demokrasi* (1. basım). Alfa.

<sup>185</sup> Axiallis, E. (2014). Political Islam and the secular state in Turkey: Democracy, reform and the Justice and Development Party. I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

<sup>186</sup> Akdoğan, Y. (2010). The Meaning of Conservative Democratic Political Identity. In M. H. Yavuz (Ed.), *The emergence of a new Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (Nachdr.). The Univ. of Utah Press.

<sup>187</sup> Akdoğan, 2014, 16. See also Duran, B., & Kanat, K. B. (Eds.). (2020). *AK Party years in Türkiye: Domestic and foreign policy* (1. baskı). SETA.

to overcome financial crises, promote economic liberalization, spur robust growth, and facilitate democratization by complying with European Union norms.<sup>188</sup>

This concept of conservative democracy allowed the AKP to maintain an ideological flexibility crucial to its success. The party presented itself as a modern political movement that respected Turkey's cultural and religious heritage while embracing the principles of democracy and human rights. Its program explicitly rejected any interpretation of secularism as hostility towards religion, arguing instead that secularism ensured freedom of religion and conscience. This rebranding enabled the AKP to appeal to a broad base, including secularists impressed by the party's promises to improve Turkey's relations with the European Union. In this sense, The AKP embraced modernity in a way that did not reject tradition and such that conservative democracy was based on the social and cultural traditions of the Turkish people, seemingly without breaking away from alleged universal democratic principles:

Our party considers religion to be one of the most important institutions of humanity, secularism to be a prerequisite of democracy and an assurance of the freedom of religion and conscience. It also rejects the interpretation and distortion of secularism as enmity against religion.<sup>189</sup>

In this regard, the personality of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan<sup>190</sup> was important for the success of the AKP. In his figure, the party found a charismatic leader whom the mass of the population could identify. At the same time, figures like Abdullah Gül and the then Minister of Economy Ali Babacan, who were well-known in international institutions, represented the other “pole” of the party, which was made of personalities blending liberal and conservative ideas.<sup>191</sup> Overall, the AKP's effort to relate the seemingly conflictual perspectives of modernity and religion was a pragmatic attitude that sought approval from the different sizes of the Turkish polarized electorate. Such a move seemed to fit in well with the argument of an undergoing “process of nationalization of Islam and (...) Islamization of nationalism.”<sup>192</sup> Consequently, many have noted how the AKP's rise to power set a new paradigm in Turkey's political milieu, particularly concerning the country's relationship with Islam and the state.<sup>193</sup>

This shift was also reflected in the party's approach to foreign policy. With a stable government and a reliable majority in Parliament, the AKP's administration pursued a more concerted

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<sup>188</sup> Duran & Kanat, 2020, 11.

<sup>189</sup> See the AKP's manifestos, 2002-2018. See also a very comprehensive analysis, Kadioğlu, A., & Cengiz, B. R. (2023). Imperious Nationalism in New Turkey: Foreign Policy Discourses in the AKP's Electoral Manifestos. In A. Özerdem & A. E. Öztürk (Eds.), *A Companion to Modern Turkey's Centennial* (pp. 66–77). Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>190</sup> This will be further explored in the individual level section.

<sup>191</sup> Pope, H. (2012). Erdoğan's Decade. *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 4, 43-57.

<sup>192</sup> Waxman, D. (2000). Islam and Turkish National Identity: A Reappraisal. *The Turkish Yearbook*, XXX, 1–22.

<sup>193</sup> See Nasr, 2005; Tepe, 2005; Turunc, 2007; Öniş, & Keyman, 2003.

and consistent foreign policy than many of its predecessors.<sup>194</sup> As such, the new party viewed this change as part of a modernization movement that brought together local and global political dynamics without losing important characteristics of national identity to foreign interests.<sup>195</sup> For the sake of this thesis's focus, it is important to underline how Turkey is a good example to analyze the complexities involved in the relationship between the local elaboration of Islam and global power relations.<sup>196</sup> Gulalp,<sup>197</sup> for example, views the rise of Islamicist politics in Turkey since 1980 as a response to the frustration of the promises of modernization under the impact of economic globalization. According to Keyder,<sup>198</sup> however, the rise of political Islam owes its broadening appeal to the actual practice of limited modernization, which did not expand political liberalism and citizenship rights in Turkey. Gulalp views the oppositional character of Islam in terms of cultural globalization.<sup>199</sup> Authors such as Turunç argue that “an effective analysis of the rise of Islamicist politics needs to go beyond the above explanations, especially regarding the AKP.”<sup>200</sup> His view is similar to the opinion of Öniş<sup>201</sup> and Keyder,<sup>202</sup> who argue that the AKP is, in part, a political protest expressing the grievances of the poorest marginal segments of the population who are excluded from the benefits of globalization.<sup>203</sup> However, while accepting that Islamicist politics might be seen as a movement of the poor and marginalized, Turunç suggests that this approach can be misleading unless the contingent connection between poverty and religious belief is established. This also goes against Mardin's view, which states that Islam establishes bridges between various groups because it provides a common cultural outlook shared by the upper and lower classes.<sup>204</sup> Contrarily, one can argue that, to exist, these bridges must be constructed politically by the state ruling elite, including civil and military bureaucrats and political parties, such that state managers and political elites fundamentally shape Islamic ideology in response to domestic and international political and economic pressure.<sup>205</sup> Accordingly,

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<sup>194</sup> Hale, 2012, 139.

<sup>195</sup> The party defended itself by arguing that “it [did] not intend to reverse the secular system, but only to moderate the extreme restrictions placed on Islamic symbols.”. Erdoğan himself has taken pains publicly to disown the ‘Muslim Democrat’ label and to embrace the idea of “conservative democracy” instead. See Turunç, 2007, 82.

<sup>196</sup> Idem.

<sup>197</sup> Gülalp, H. (1997). Globalizing postmodernism: Islamist and Western social theory. *Economy and Society*, 26(3), 419–433.xwww

<sup>198</sup> Keyder, Ç. (1997). Whither the project of modernity. In S. Bozdoğan & R. Kasaba (Eds.), *Rethinking modernity and national identity in Turkey*. Univ. of Washington Press.

<sup>199</sup> Cultural globalization, which implies a move toward greater cultural integration based on individualism, rationality, and progress, also invokes ideas of cultural relativism, leading to the rise of identity politics, the recognition of the diversity of local cultures, and the right to multiple paths of modernity. See Ritzer, G. (2000) *The McDonaldisation of Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press).

<sup>200</sup> Turunç, 2007, 83.

<sup>201</sup> Onis, 1998..

<sup>202</sup> Keyder, 1997.

<sup>203</sup> Turunç, 2007, 84.

<sup>204</sup> Mardin, Ş. (1997). Projects as methodology: Some thoughts on modern Turkish science. In S. Bozdoğan & R. Kasaba (Eds.), *Rethinking modernity and national identity in Turkey*. Univ. of Washington Press.

<sup>205</sup> Turunç, 2007, 85.

it is difficult to articulate the political importance of the AKP within conceptual categories provided by both the modernization and globalization perspectives. Rather than setting up the traditional/local and modern/global as cultural opposites, we should examine how the AKP utilizes religious belief to advance its participation in the global economy.<sup>206</sup>

Furthermore, regarding laicism, the AKP's first-ever program expressed a democratic approach that appeared to convince many liberals.<sup>207</sup> On one hand, the AKP defined religion as a sacred and collective value that should not be the subject of political partisanship causing divisiveness, clearly demarcating itself from the Kemalist project of modernization. On the other hand, the party further observed that,

we are now witnessing not a differentiation and polarization of ideologies with sharp and bold lines of division between them but the formation of new political courses accompanying the pervasiveness of different ideologies. We have before us a more colored and multi-dimensional picture rather than a sharp black-and-white image.<sup>208</sup>

The AKP also emphasized that a significant part of Turkish society wished to adopt a concept of modernity that does not reject tradition, a belief in universalism that accepts localism, an understanding of rationalism that does not disregard the spiritual meaning of life, and a choice for change that is not fundamentalist.<sup>209</sup> Thus,

the AKP's aim was to reproduce a Turkish system of local and deep-rooted values in harmony with the universal standards of conservatism – a modern and open-to-change conservatism, not one that rests on maintaining the status quo. However, it supported a process of change that is evolutionary, gradual, and based on transformation in its natural discourse. The AKP seems to frame its political understanding according to international political and legal norms on the one hand and a need to protect local institutions that serve democracy on the other.<sup>210</sup>

Another element that favored the initial success of the AKP's formula is that there was no apparent “liberal” or “socialist/social-democratic” front in Turkish politics, in contrast to which the party could claim to function as a conservative counterweight. This allowed it to task in Turkey to reconstruct and occupy the “old center” with a new type of conservatism embracing “a rejection of all class/group-based interest politics, which are the rule in the West, and claims to represent the ‘whole nation,’ instead of, for example, only those who voted for the AKP.”<sup>211</sup> As such, one can also

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<sup>206</sup> AK Parti. (2001). *Ak Parti Programı 2001. Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme*. TBMM Kütüphanesi Açık Erişim Koleksiyonu. <https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/server/api/core/bitstreams/3370001d-0a58-415c-bd99-c522d9427e84/content>, 2.

<sup>207</sup> Idem.

<sup>208</sup> Turunc, 2007, 86.

<sup>209</sup> Gunter, M. M., & Hakan Yavuz, M. (2007). Turkish paradox: Progressive Islamists versus reactionary secularists. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 16(3), 289-301.

<sup>210</sup> Turunc, 2007, 86.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 89.

consider its initial project “a code word signaling the new elite’s determination to survive politically without upsetting the boat and bolstering its cultural constituency with the momentum of globalization of the 2000s.”<sup>212</sup>

Overall, this last point seems to confirm Hale’s understanding that “it was not until 2002 that a stable government with a reliable majority was established under the AKP, a development that provided Erdoğan’s government with a significant advantage over its predecessors.”<sup>213</sup> As such, this stability gave more room to the AKP to concretize its ideas also in foreign policy.<sup>214</sup> However, similarly to Menderes and Özal’s experience, pushing for change in a specific direction required the incumbent party to cope with the impediments represented by Turkey’s political and military establishment and, at the same time, to shape its international credibility. According to Zürcher, “paradoxically, even when in power, the AKP had the mentality of an underdog. This was because, although government and Parliament were in the AKP’s hands, the state machinery, judiciary, police and army were not.”<sup>215</sup> In other words, the military and the judiciary still felt powerful enough to challenge the AKP and worked to limit the role of Islam in the public sphere. Thus, the party had to operate within these institutional limitations and be restrained in initiating independent policies. Therefore, “due to domestic constraints and the broader institutional environment,” the first AKP administration could not formulate its independent foreign policy.<sup>216</sup> Contrarily, it adopted an accommodation strategy that aimed at balancing the party’s long-term objectives and the internal and external constraints and opportunities it had to consider.<sup>217</sup>

#### **6.2.1.1. *The War in Iraq and the March 1 Motion***

The restrictive internal level on which the AKP had to operate was immediately evidenced by the domestic debate over Turkey’s eventual involvement in the Iraqi War. As previously mentioned, the Turkish Parliament’s decision on March 1, 2003, to reject the motion supporting the US military action in Iraq stands as a perplexing and significant moment in the recent history of TFP. It has already been underscored that, at the time, Turkey, a NATO member and a long-standing ally of Washington, was widely expected to support the US-led operation. Ankara had significant strategic interests in

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<sup>212</sup> Interview with former MP.

<sup>213</sup> Hale, 2012, 139.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Zürcher, 2017, 339.

<sup>216</sup> Kara, 2022, 5.

<sup>217</sup> “In response, the AKP followed a carefully crafted strategy of accommodating not only the generals but also the established capitalists of the Republican *ancien régime*, the mainstream media, as well as the US and the EU.” See Hoffmann & Cemgil, 2016, 1291.

participating in the war, particularly in maintaining control over developments in Northern Iraq and mitigating the risks posed by a potential Kurdish state. Furthermore, given Turkey's fragile economy, which was still recovering from the 2001 financial crisis, US economic support was seen as crucial. Seemingly, the rejection of the motion also represents an interesting case to understand how the complexity of agents, institutions, and mechanisms impacted – and were impacted by – an intricate domestic-international conjuncture. The March 1 motion (*1 Mart Tezkeresi*) was particularly unexpected because it challenged the traditional role of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) in foreign policy matters. It is worth recalling that in Turkey, foreign and security policy has long been considered the domain of elite state institutions, particularly the executive and the military, with Parliament playing a secondary, “often rubber-stamp role.”<sup>218</sup> This was especially true under single-party governments, where the executive branch, supported by a parliamentary majority, was expected to maintain firm control over foreign policy decisions, particularly those related to national security. As Kaarbo and Kesgin note, this decision by the Turkish Parliament is intriguing not just because it went against the cabinet's position but also because it contradicts established theoretical expectations in the literature on comparative politics and foreign policy for which parliaments are generally not expected to play a significant role in foreign policy decision-making, particularly in matters of national security.<sup>219</sup> The assumption is that they lack the expertise to rival the Foreign and Defense Ministries and are usually reluctant to compromise the image of a united national front in the face of external threats. This is especially strong under single-party governments, where internal cohesion is presumed to minimize the influence of parliamentary factions.<sup>220</sup> As conventional wisdom suggests, “single-party governments are less vulnerable to removal from office,” and “as long as the governing party members remain as a unified group,” the powers of Parliament do not have any practical effect.<sup>221</sup> As such, the TGNA's decisive role in rejecting the motion on March 1, 2003, represents a substantial departure from political tradition in Turkey and the prevailing expectations in IR literature. Thus, this suggests adopting an expanded Historical Institutionalist

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<sup>218</sup> Robins, P. (2003). Confusion at home, Confusion abroad: Turkey between Copenhagen and Iraq. *International Affairs (London)*, 79(3), 547–566. Constitutionally, the only circumstance in which the Parliament was to assume a role in foreign and security issues was at war. The Turkish Constitution requires parliamentary approval for a declaration of war, the stationing of foreign troops in Turkey, and the dispatch of Turkish forces abroad ‘when there is international legitimacy to do so’ (Turkish Constitution, Article 92). But even when Parliament is involved, Parliament “looks very much like a talking chamber. Its members speak a lot, but in the end, they endorse what the cabinet or the chief executive proposes.” See Calis, Saban. (1995) The Turkish State's Identity and Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process. *Mediterranean Quarterly* 6(2), 138.

<sup>219</sup> Kesgin, B., & Kaarbo, J. (2010). When and How Parliaments Influence Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey's Iraq Decision. *International Studies Perspectives*, 11(1), 19–36.

<sup>220</sup> Palmer, G., London, T., & Regan, P. (2004). What's Stopping You?: The Sources of Political Constraints on International Conflict Behavior in Parliamentary Democracies. *International Interactions*, 30(1), 1–24.

<sup>221</sup> Heidenheimer, A. J. (1959). Foreign Policy and Party Discipline in the C.D.U. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 13(1), 75.

perspective to understand the background dynamics and subsequent impacts underlying this historical juncture.

First of all, the dynamics of the “Iraq debate” in Turkey were shaped by the lingering memories – among the leadership and the public – of the Gulf War in 1990-1991, when Turkey’s cooperation with the United States did not yield the anticipated benefits and the country significant economic losses due to the disruption of trade with Iraq, a key economic partner. Beyond financial concerns, both Turkish elites and the public were deeply apprehensive about the potential political ramifications of the war, particularly regarding the Kurdish question in Northern Iraq. Unlike the First Gulf War, where Turkey had reluctantly supported US actions, the newly elected AKP government faced a difficult task in convincing the public that another war against Iraq was necessary.<sup>222</sup> The perception in Turkey was that Iraq “would not...bother Turkey,” and the potential threat from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, a central justification for the US invasion, “went largely unnoticed in Turkey.”<sup>223</sup> Yet, public opposition to the war was overwhelming, with most of the Turkish population against military involvement.<sup>224</sup> The US operation in Iraq was widely regarded as “unlawful, immoral, and unprincipled” aggression. This strong anti-war and anti-American sentiment made it increasingly difficult for Turkish leaders to ignore public opinion despite the country’s long-standing military alliance with the United States. As Tokdemir et al. highlight, anti-American attitudes in Turkey are embraced by nearly all segments of Turkish society: secular, nationalist, leftist, and Islamist traditions can share anti-American attitudes with different motivations.<sup>225</sup> According to Filkins and Miller,

The showdown between the Bush administration and Turkey reflects the deep-seated antipathy felt by an overwhelming majority of the Turkish people for the American military plans. Turkey’s leaders say that despite their country’s 50-year-old military alliance with the United States, they are finding it difficult to disregard the public’s anti-war feelings.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Kesgin, & Kaarbo, 2010.

<sup>223</sup> Çağaptay, S. (2003). Why Are the Turks Hesitating on Iraq? *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 704.

<sup>224</sup> Gözen, R. (1995). Causes and Consequences of Turkey’s Out-of-War Position in the Iraq War of 2003. *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 36, 01–27.

<sup>225</sup> Although the author personally sees the word “sentiment” as sometimes too generalist to assess such blurred dynamics in Turkey’s domestic politics, it still represents a valid parameter used in the literature. See Tokdemir, E., Metintaş, M., & Köstem, S. (2024). A Multi-Dimensional Evaluation of Turkish Public Opinion towards the United States. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 1–24. Similarly, Türkmen takes the idiosyncrasies of anti-Americanism in Turkey into the category of sovereign nationalist anti-Americanism, where national identity is the most important political value behind the negative attitude. In a similar vein, Grigoriadis and Aras argue that contemporary anti-American sentiments are primarily nationalist-sovereign, and the anti-Americanism in Turkish public opinion is coupled with an anti-US media landscape. For Tokdemir et al., such divergent motivations among the Turkish public set the country apart from anti-American behavior elsewhere in the Middle East. See Grigoriadis, 2010; Grigoriadis, I. N., & Aras, Ü. E. (2023). Distrusted Partnership: Unpacking Anti-Americanism in Turkey. *Middle East Policy*, 30(1), 122–136; Türkmen, F. (2010). Anti-Americanism as a Default Ideology of Opposition: Turkey as a Case Study. *Turkish Studies*, 11(3), 329–345.

<sup>226</sup> Filkins, D. (2003, February 18). Proposal by Turkey Stalls U.S. Bid to Use Its Bases. *The New York Times*, A12. Gale Academic OneFile.



In addition, Kapsis's critique of the US overconfidence and inadequate diplomacy<sup>227</sup> seemed to be confirmed by the memoirs of the head of the Turkish negotiation team.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, this prolonged negotiation process also created pressure on members of the Turkish Parliament, who received hundreds of text messages daily: "Say No to War."<sup>229</sup> Therefore, the MPs and the AKP government were not in a position to alienate voters and sympathizers. Moreover, the Turks demonstrated sensitivity to large numbers of foreign troops on the national soil.<sup>230</sup> As Mufti puts it,

the new AK Party leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gül, which confronted a party base that had yet to shed all vestiges of Erbakan's anti-Western chauvinism as well as a broader electorate overwhelmingly opposed to the war and the TSK command under Chief of Staff Hilmi Özkök - a pragmatist who himself assumed office in August 2002, and likewise confronted suspicions about American intentions among his subordinates - were put in a difficult position by the US request for assistance during the build-up to the invasion.<sup>231</sup>

Within this context, the government's response to US demands was marked by mixed signals that reflected internal divisions within the party and the broader Turkish state apparatus. The Turkish military, traditionally a robust and influential player in foreign policy, was notably reserved during this period. Chief of Staff Hilmi Özkök maintained that the decision was ultimately the government's to make, even though it was widely known that the military was keen on controlling developments in Northern Iraq to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish state.<sup>232</sup> Özkök's cautious approach was influenced by his belief that a more assertive military stance might conflict with Turkey's ongoing democratization process. The previously influential MGK, which had historically played a dominant role in shaping Turkish security policy, assumed only an advisory role, recommending the government to take the March 1 motion to Parliament. The TSK and MFA tried to resolve the inconsistencies between their security needs (shaping the new disposition in Iraq) and culturally rooted normative constraints (against collaborating with the US) by suggesting that Turkey enter Iraq unilaterally even before the Americans arrived to prevent, in the words of a report outlining the findings of a TSK-MFA coordination group, "negative developments" such as the United States "becoming the only foreign power with a say" in Iraq and then "granting a bigger role for Kurdish forces in the north."<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Kapsis, 2005.

<sup>228</sup> Bölükbaşı reports at least one occasion where he left the negotiation room with frustration. Bölükbaşı, D. (2008). *1 Mart vakası: Irak tezkeresi ve sonrası* (6. baskı). Doğan Kitap.

<sup>229</sup> Kesgin & Kaarbo, 2010.

<sup>230</sup> Çağaptay 2003; Aksoy, S. Z. (2018). The Turkish Stance Toward The Us Requests For The 2003 Iraq War: A Case Of Norms Versus Interests? *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 10(2), 8–47.

<sup>231</sup> Mufti, 2009, 149.

<sup>232</sup> See, for instance, his interview in Bianet. (2007, October 1). *1 Mart Tezkeresiyle İlgili Konuşaydım TSK'nın Hali Ne Olurdu?*. <https://bianet.org/haber/1-mart-tezkeresiyle-ilgili-konussaydim-tsk-nin-hali-ne-olurdu-102069>.

<sup>233</sup> The comments on the MFA-TSK discussions can be seen in Demir, C. K., Kavakli, S., & Sert, A. (2020). *Irak Savaşında ABD Ordusu*. Jandarma ve Sahil Güvenlik Akademisi Yayınları.

The internal dynamics within the AKP were equally complex and showed the dilemma facing the Turkish government in the words of Erdoğan: “Our moral priority is peace, but our political priority is our dear Turkey.”<sup>234</sup> Prime Minister Gül was initially reluctant to support US war efforts, reflecting his concerns about the potential fallout from such a decision. It was not until early to mid-February 2003 that Gül publicly declared that his government had abandoned hopes for a diplomatic solution and had decided to align with the US.<sup>235</sup> However, Erdoğan, the party leader but not yet Prime Minister, was more inclined to support the US due to economic and strategic concerns. Still, he was constrained by public opinion and his lack of formal policymaking powers at the time. Other key figures within the AKP, such as Speaker of the TGNA Bülent Arınç, Deputy Prime Ministers Ertuğrul Yalçınbayır and Abdullatif Şener, were firmly against the war and Turkey’s involvement.<sup>236</sup> The government’s indecisiveness was revealed in its delay in sending the motion to Parliament, which further fueled speculation and uncertainty. As Robins aptly puts it, “Rather than responding boldly and with leadership to growing signs of dissatisfaction, the government resorted to further vacillation.”<sup>237</sup> Moreover, the government and the AKP leadership did not even force party discipline on the vote; instead, Erdoğan stated that the party “would allow [its] group members to act following what their conscience tells them to do.”<sup>238</sup> Accordingly, it might be that he, like others, “never thought the motion would fail and trusted it would pass even without party discipline enforced. While some opposition was expected, the assumption was that it would not be enough to block approval.”<sup>239</sup> When the TGNA finally voted on March 1, 2003, the motion to support US military action failed by a narrow margin: 264 MPs voted in favor, 250 against, and 19 abstained. The motion required a majority of MPs to be present, and it failed by just three votes. This outcome shocked both the government and the opposition, given that it was based on an agreement between the US and Turkey largely in line with Turkish demands.<sup>240</sup> As such, the government’s delay allowed the Parliament to assume the role of the decision-making authority. One explanation can be that, in the context of a divided and hesitant executive, the MPs chose to heed public opinion rather than align with the government’s position. In addition, as one party whip from the opposition remarked, defections from the AKP exceeded

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<sup>234</sup> Filkins, 2003.

<sup>235</sup> Brown, 2007, 99.

<sup>236</sup> See Kardaş, Ş. (2010). Turkey and the Iraqi Crisis: JDP Between Identity and Interest. In M. H. Yavuz (Ed.), *The emergence of a new Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (Nachdr.). The Univ. of Utah Press.

<sup>237</sup> Robins, 2003, 563.

<sup>238</sup> Brown, 2007, 101.

<sup>239</sup> Kesgin & Kaarbo, 2010. This was confirmed in an interview with two former MPs and a journalist at the time.

<sup>240</sup> Indeed, claims that “[f]or Turkey it was the deal of the decade.” The final text, as it was embodied in the March 1 motion, included 62,000 American troops (also 255 warplanes and 65 helicopters) to be stationed in Turkey, a financial compensation package of \$26 billion (\$2 billion in aid, the rest as loan guarantees), the right for Turkey to deploy 40,000 troops in coordination with the United States in Northern Iraq, and a US commitment to the maintenance of a unitary state in Iraq, See Robins 2003, 564, in Kesgin & Kaarbo, 2010, 30.

expectations, illustrating a “serious rupture between the MPs and the executive branch.”<sup>241</sup> Third, the aftermath of the March 1 vote led to significant changes within the AKP government. After the vote, the chairman of the Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Commission, Mehmet Dülger, said a “new motion...should be presented in a different manner to Parliament and a strong-looking government with a stronger voice is also needed.”<sup>242</sup> This stronger became more possible when, on March 14, Erdoğan replaced Gül as Prime Minister.<sup>243</sup> This allowed him to exert greater influence over the decision-making process. Subsequently, a new motion was presented to Parliament on March 20, granting the US crucial overflight rights but not directly committing Turkey to the Iraq war. This motion passed with a 332-202 vote, marking Turkey’s reluctant inclusion in the US-led “Coalition of the Willing,” albeit in a more limited capacity than originally anticipated. A noteworthy conclusion on the issue and its implications for the future of TFP at the time is that

although it may be tempting to draw a link between the AK Party’s Islamist roots and the failure of the 1 March resolution – and although party leaders did indeed engage in some buck-passing with the military in an effort to avoid alienating their electoral base – the main responsibility for the fiasco clearly lay with the Republican elite still guided by memories of Sèvres: the CHP, which voted en masse against the resolution (as opposed to three-quarters of AK Party deputies who voted for it); President Sezer, who maintained his opposition throughout; and above all key segments of the TSK command.<sup>244</sup>

As US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz put it,

Many of the institutions in Turkey that we think of as the traditional strong support in the alliance were not as forceful in leading in that direction ... particularly the military. I think, for whatever reason, they did not play the strong leadership role on this issue that we would have expected.<sup>245</sup>

Therefore, the 1 March Motion underscored the shifting dynamics within the Turkish state and how the traditional roles of the military and the National Security Council were significantly diminishing, reflecting broader changes in TFP under the AKP government. Ultimately, this case demonstrates that even in situations where strategic alliances and national interests seem clear-cut, domestic factors

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<sup>241</sup> Yetkin, M. (2003, March 2). Hukümet Krizi. *Radikal*.

<sup>242</sup> Balcı, K. (2003, March 9). Dülger: Turkey Needs Government With Strong Voice. *Turkish Probe*.

<sup>243</sup> Prime Minister Gül had already considered resigning right after the vote but then was convinced to wait until Erdoğan became Prime Minister. Indeed, they were waiting for the latter to be officially elected as MPs after the closure of the judicial case pending on his head for its “pro-Islamist statements” before the AKP came to office. *Idem*.

<sup>244</sup> For instance, on one side, CHP leader Deniz Baykal maintained his fidelity to the paradigm that grew out of World War I and Sèvres, insistently warning against collaborating with predatory powers that stood ever-ready to violate Turkey’s sovereignty and undermine its unity. If the 1 March resolution had passed, he argued, the ‘American flag’ would have flown over southeastern Turkey, Ankara would have lost ‘control over ethnic developments,’ and “Anatolia would have become what Iraq has become.” See Baykal’s interviews in Sazak, D. (2007, August 15). Asker Göndermede Aceleci Olmayalım. *Milliyet*.

<sup>245</sup> US Department of Defense News Transcript, 5 May 2003, <http://dod.mil/transcripts>. For anonymous American criticisms, see Birand, M. A. (2023, May 10). ABD’yi Şaşırtan Türkler Kim. *Milliyet* and Ergin, S. (2003, July 4). Washington’un Askere Bakışı. *Hürriyet*. It has been suggested that some Kurdish members of Turkey’s Parliament voted against the resolution to keep Turkish troops out of Iraqi Kurdistan: see Bölükbaşı, 2008, 137.

– from public opinion to internal political divisions – can play a decisive role in shaping foreign policy outcomes. On the one hand, Prime Minister Erdogan would later stake out the other side of the debate: “I wish we had entered Iraq [in March 2003]. If we had, the current unfavorable situation would not have arisen.”<sup>246</sup> Yet, it was more the security elites who “found themselves in the greatest perplexity.”<sup>247</sup> As they struggled to prevent change abroad from accelerating change at home, “Iraq once again reminded them of two painful lessons: that stability is a mirage and flux the norm, and that inflexible attachment to a security paradigm increasingly incongruent with prevailing imperatives can only yield paralysis.”<sup>248</sup>

### 6.2.2. Europeanization and Reforms

The above-described case of the internal discrepancies and inconsistencies over the March 1 Motion well depicts how, despite its electoral successes, the AKP government faced some severe domestic challenges, mainly because it aimed to limit the power of the authoritarian secularist state elite, represented by the military, the judiciary, parts of the civil service, other than the opposition represented by the CHP. As such, gaining political leverage on the state’s autonomy and establishing direct control over its organs, particularly the army, became the most crucial theme of the first ten years of the AKP’s mandate. Moreover, with the opposition parties weakened by the result of the 2002 elections, a remaining political obstacle within the state mechanisms came from President Necdet Sezer. A staunch secularist, Sezer viewed the AKP’s reforms as potential threats to the secular foundation of the Republic. With his background as a former judge in the constitutional court, Sezer frequently leveraged his authority to challenge legislation passed by the AKP in Parliament, often referring to the Constitutional Court, where many of these laws were deemed unconstitutional.<sup>249</sup> However, there is no doubt that “in this struggle, the AKP found a strong partner in the European Union.”<sup>250</sup> This was favored by the fact that, unlike its Islamist predecessors, the AKP has been classified as “conservative globalist”: conservative on social and cultural issues but globalist in its

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<sup>246</sup> Erdoğan quoted in CNN Türk. (2006, September 6). *Erdoğan: Keşke Irak’a Girseydik*. <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/erdogan-keske-iraka-girseydik-188275>. For an assessment highlighting the absence of better alternatives for the Turkish leadership, see Hale, W. M. (2007). *Turkey, the US and Iraq*. Saqi, 163-62.

<sup>247</sup> Mufti, 2009, 153.

<sup>248</sup> Idem.

<sup>249</sup> This reaction was expected, given that the Constitution in effect was still the one established by the military junta in 1982. Sezer also refused to approve over three hundred appointment decrees submitted by the AKP cabinet and rigorously enforced the ban on headscarves in public service. His commitment to secularism was so strong that he declined to welcome the headscarf-wearing spouses of AKP politicians at the presidential palace. The AKP eagerly anticipated the end of Sezer’s seven-year term in 2007. The question of who would succeed Sezer became a crucial and highly contentious battle between the AKP and its adversaries. Idem.

<sup>250</sup> Zürcher, 2017, 339.

acceptance of Turkey's integration into the international economic and political system.<sup>251</sup> In line with its commitment to liberalize the political system and push forward with Turkey's drive for EU membership, the AKP government could continue the reform process without the burden of a reluctant coalition partner that had conditioned Ecevit's efforts. Although, since 1999, Turkey's candidacy for EU membership had significantly driven political and legal reforms, its most notable and ambitious alignment with European norms was realized when EU membership became a more tangible prospect in the early 2000s.<sup>252</sup> In this context, the EU has acted as a "strong external force" promoting internal change. While the EU was not the sole factor behind this process, it undeniably played a crucial role in encouraging domestic reforms and the europeanization of Turkey.<sup>253</sup> Thus, this helps to understand the framework of institutional change in the domestic realm in the context of the "civilianization process" of the Turkish political system. As Tocci had timely resumed, the issue revolved around two central questions:

Did the accession process cause or trigger the reforms in Turkey as an external force driving, if not imposing internal change? Or can domestic change be explained better by the interaction between internal and external factors, whereby the external EU anchor was perceived and used by internal actors to gain sufficient strength and credibility to advance domestic reforms?<sup>254</sup>

In her view, change took place not simply because it was imposed from the outside but also because it interacted with domestic developments on the inside. Accordingly, the AKP government's dedication to political reforms and EU accession can be understood through both interest-based and ideological lenses. From an interest-based perspective, embracing reform and pursuing EU membership can be seen as a strategic approach for the AKP to enhance its legitimacy, distancing itself from its Islamist roots in the eyes of the international community and Turkey's secular establishment. Additionally, democratic reforms and the push for EU accession were considered vital for the AKP's political survival, particularly given that the Constitutional Court repeatedly banned its more Islamist-oriented predecessors for allegedly threatening the secular character of the

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<sup>251</sup> Öniş, Z. (2007). Conservative globalists versus defensive nationalists: Political parties and paradoxes of Europeanization in Turkey. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 9(3), 250.

<sup>252</sup> At the 2002 Copenhagen summit, the EU decided to admit ten new members in 2004, but Turkey was not included in this group. Instead, Turkey received a commitment that its membership prospects would be reconsidered at the summit in The Hague in December 2004. The EU promised that if Turkey met the 'Copenhagen criteria' by that time, membership negotiations would commence without further delay. This commitment became popularly known as the 'date for a date'. During the intervening period, debates within Europe about the borders of Europe and Turkey's suitability as a European nation intensified. However, the December 2004 summit ultimately gave the green light, and on 3 October 2005, formal membership negotiations with Turkey began. See Müftüler-Baç, 2005.

<sup>253</sup> As many scholars on Turkey-EU studies have accepted, "Europeanization refers to the domestic impact of European institutions and practices, the European Union (EU) in particular. The process of Europeanization leads to significant changes in domestic politics, changing both political structures (e.g., institutions) and policies. Therefore, it would be appropriate to frame Europeanization as a 'set of ordinary processes of change' Then, understanding Europeanization requires 'an understanding of the structure and dynamics of each change process.'" For an account and other authors, see Sarigil, Z. (2007). Europeanization as Institutional Change: The Case of the Turkish Military. *Mediterranean Politics*, 12(1), 41.

<sup>254</sup> Tocci, 2005, 74.

Republic.<sup>255</sup> On an ideological level, the AKP's commitment to reform and EU accession might represent an integral part of its political identity. The party consciously avoided labeling itself as an "Islamic" formation, instead advocating for broader religious freedoms. To maintain a consistent political message, the AKP also championed personal liberties in other areas, including cultural and linguistic rights. As such, its support for EU membership was "framed not merely as a goal to be achieved through difficult reforms but as a means to realize broader reform objectives, which were as significant as EU membership itself."<sup>256</sup> According to Başak Alpan, the AKP articulated a cosmopolitan discourse targeting integration with Europe and the rest of the world in political, economic, and cultural terms.<sup>257</sup> As such, Europeanization became the central paradigm, overhauling the civil and penal codes in line with the *acquis* and leaving its imprints on all facets of social and political life, from civil-military relations to corruption and employment.<sup>258</sup> While maintaining Turkey's pro-Western orientation and European anchor in a liberal internationalist framework<sup>259</sup>, this was also the era when the AKP, with its likeminded Foreign Ministers Yaşar Yakış, Ali Babacan, and Abdullah Gül, in succession, systematically endeavored to de-securitize its foreign policy issues and employ its soft power assets such as economic interdependence and promoting mediation roles in regional conflicts.<sup>260</sup> TFP pursued "active globalization," targeting the construction of regional and global networks of shared interests.<sup>261</sup>

Concretely, the AKP government was brave – or opportunistic – enough to exploit the momentum. In the 2003 summer, the Parliament passed what was known as the "sixth and seventh harmonization packages" to satisfy the Copenhagen criteria. The stride of this period of reforms was "breathtaking."<sup>262</sup> Between October 2003 and July 2004, the Turkish Parliament enacted 261 new laws, many of which addressed the military's role in the political system, legal procedures, and human rights issues.<sup>263</sup> In the following parliamentary year, an additional 166 laws were passed. Although the pace of legislation slowed during the following periods, the cumulative impact of these legal changes during the early years of the AKP government was massive. The European Commission, in its November 2003 Progress Report, commended the Turkish government for demonstrating "great

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<sup>255</sup> Tocci, 2005, 80.

<sup>256</sup> Interview with Former Turkish Officer in EU affairs.

<sup>257</sup> Başak. 2016, 16.

<sup>258</sup> Aydın-Düzgit and Kaliber 2016, 3.

<sup>259</sup> Sarigil, 2007.

<sup>260</sup> Altunışık & Martin 2011, 571.

<sup>261</sup> Öktem, et al. 2009, 21.

<sup>262</sup> Zürcher, 2017, 339.

<sup>263</sup> Nas, Ç., & Özer, Y. (2021). *Turkey and EU integration: Achievements and obstacles* (First issued in paperback). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 59.

determination in accelerating the pace of reforms.”<sup>264</sup> However, the Commission also noted that the implementation of these reforms was inconsistent and emphasized the need for further alignment of civil-military relations with European standards and the whole exercise of cultural rights, particularly for the Kurdish population.<sup>265</sup> As Müftüler-Baç notes, “these reforms automatically brought to the foreground the dominant cleavages in Turkey, most notably that between Turkish nationalism versus recognition of other ethnic groups in Turkey, in particular the Kurds, and between secular and conservative political groups.”<sup>266</sup> In other words, the transformation was one in which “yesterday’s conservatives became the reformers, while the most outspoken opponents of the current reforms defended the principles of the twentieth-century Republican project.”<sup>267</sup>

At the same time, the AKP’s approach to Turkey’s EU membership and its relationship with the West marked a clear departure from the Turkish Islamist traditional suspicion and hostility towards the West. In its initial years in power, the AKP employed a strategy of “accommodation” to maintain its hold on power and manage domestic opposition.<sup>268</sup> This accommodation strategy of avoiding open confrontation with the military and secular establishments significantly reduced domestic pressure. As part of this approach, the AKP leadership deliberately avoided advancing issues sensitive to the military and refrained from criticizing the army.<sup>269</sup> They also steered clear of controversial topics, such as the headscarf ban in schools and universities.<sup>270</sup> To put it differently, the two areas of the greatest importance for the AKP – civil-military relations and the Kurdish issue – asked the party to “perform a delicate balancing act.”<sup>271</sup> Reducing the military’s influence in domestic politics was advantageous for the AKP, especially since the party had previously been removed from power and continuously faced threats from the military establishment. Moreover, establishing civilian control over the military was a critical requirement for EU accession. However, any aggressive move against the armed forces carried the risk of severe repercussions, potentially jeopardizing the AKP’s

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<sup>264</sup> The most important reservations that the EU had about Turkey and the areas in which most of the Turkish political changes took place can be summarized as: the role of the military in politics through the judiciary, the State Security Courts, and through the National Security Council, the Turkish Penal Code and its articles on freedom of expression and association; the death penalty; the transparency of the public sector and the violations of human rights. Müftüler-Baç, 2005.

<sup>265</sup> European Commission. (2003). *2003 Regular Report on Turkey’s Progress towards Accession*. [www.avrupa.info.tr/Files/File/Docs/2003pdf](http://www.avrupa.info.tr/Files/File/Docs/2003pdf), 23, 43-45.

<sup>266</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 2005, 18-22.

<sup>267</sup> Interview with an expert.

<sup>268</sup> Kara, 2022.

<sup>269</sup> Cizre, 2011.

<sup>270</sup> The greatest exception to this approach concerned the preacher schools (İmam-Hatip Okulları), as in May 2004 the government tried to improve and equalize the chances of graduates of these schools with regular high school graduates at university entrance examinations. However, President Necdet Sezer vetoed the proposed law based on the violation of Article 131 of the Constitution, which identifies the principle of secularism and secular education. Prime Minister Erdoğan stepped back and stated that ‘as a government we are not ready yet to pay the price,’<sup>270</sup> so he chose a conflict avoidance strategy and decided not to override the presidential veto by taking the case to the Constitutional Court and confronting the Kemalist establishment. See Heper, M. (2010). *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP*. *Middle East Journal*, 64(3), 491–492.

<sup>271</sup> Müftüler-Baç, 2005.

position. Addressing the Kurdish issue presented even more significant challenges. While resolving this question could clear a substantial obstacle on the path to EU membership and possibly attract votes, it also had the potential to alienate nationalist voters.<sup>272</sup> This accommodation strategy was also favored by a general positive attitude of the public opinion, driven by a pragmatic desire for a better and more prosperous lifestyle that could be achieved throughout the EU-led reforms.<sup>273</sup> Importantly, this strategy allowed the AKP to advocate for its political agenda by aligning its efforts with the demands of the EU, thus gradually bringing the state under its influence. Indeed, Abdullah Gül allowed that given various

conflicts of interest' between Turkey and the EU, membership would actually constrain Turkey's strategic options. Rather, accession was a 'second best solution' to the internal struggle for 'democracy [...] and human rights [...] That is the most important point [...] One would have preferred to achieve those objectives by ourselves. But we cannot.

In light of the previous considerations, it is safe to state that the Europeanization process during the first decade of the 2000s significantly influenced Turkey's civil-military relations, tipping the balance in favor of civilian authorities and particularly the AKP government. One of the most decisive changes was the National Security Council (MGK) restructuring, which fundamentally altered the military's role in Turkish politics. Historically, the MGK had functioned as a powerful mechanism through which the military exerted control over civilian governments. However, reforms introduced during this period transformed it into a purely advisory body. As Altunışık notes, "the General Secretariat is now confined to a research and analytical role, having been stripped of executive prerogatives," and the MGK itself "has in effect been reconstituted as a solely consultative body, by eliminating its powers to monitor and enforce civilian governments' compliance with Council decisions."<sup>274</sup> In May 2004, the infamous state security courts (*devlet güvenlik mahkemeleri*) with their military judges were abolished. For the first time, a civilian was appointed as the MGK's secretary, and the military lost its privileged position in several key state institutions, such as the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and the Council on Higher Education (YÖK). The AKP government, though cautious, moved swiftly to implement these changes. Less than a year into its tenure, in October 2004, the Grand National Assembly voted to amend the rules governing the MGK, thereby weakening the military's grip on civilian governance. Military appointees were

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<sup>272</sup> This will be addressed later in a separate section.

<sup>273</sup> Şenyuva, Ö. (2006). Turkish Public Opinion and European Union Membership: The State of the Art in Public Opinion Studies in Turkey. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 11(1), 19–32.

<sup>274</sup> Altunışık, 2005, 54.



removed from regulatory bodies. The MGK would no longer be run by a general recommended as Secretary General by the chief of staff but by a civilian handpicked by the Prime Minister.<sup>275</sup>

The government largely justified these reforms as necessary steps toward opening negotiations for EU membership. This rationale “provided sufficient cover even among some of the top military officials and Kemalist opponents of the AKP.”<sup>276</sup> The EU’s role as an external legitimizing force was crucial as it empowered civilian actors in Turkey by providing them with a solid external reference point. As such, the EU’s influence “altered power structures among political actors in the domestic space,” enabling the civilian side to push for reforms that would have been unthinkable in the past.<sup>277</sup> However, the military’s acceptance of these reforms raises intriguing questions, particularly given its long history as a powerful political actor in Turkey.<sup>278</sup> Scholars have pondered why a traditionally dominant institution like the military would consent to reduce its power,<sup>279</sup> and why a veto player should accept the loss of power vis-a-vis other political actors. “How can we explain this change, which is considered unthinkable?”<sup>280</sup> Certainly, the answer lies in a complex interplay of factors. First, while the military was deeply concerned about the implications of these reforms for its political influence, it was also aware that any overt opposition could severely damage its legitimacy and credibility. The military had historically expressed its commitment to Westernization, and rejecting Europeanization reforms outright would have contradicted these publicly stated commitments. In other words, “the shadow of the past” constrained the military and forced it to comply with the reform process.<sup>281</sup> This phenomenon, referred to as “rhetorical entrapment,” occurs when “a cost-free rhetorical commitment or a shrewd argumentative move in one situation can turn into a costly constraint in another.”<sup>282</sup> This picture indicates that the military found itself in a dilemma where its involvement in civilian politics sharply contrasted with the ideals of “democracy” and “Westernization,” which requires civilian supremacy over the military. The Europeanization efforts in post-Helsinki Turkey, especially the proposed MGK reform, increased the saliency of this dilemma. On the one hand, part of the military continued to support Turkey’s EU bid,

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<sup>275</sup> Waldman, S., & Caliskan, E. (2016). *The new Turkey and its discontents*. Hurst & Company, 22-24.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with a Turkish political strategist at the time.

<sup>277</sup> Güney, A., & Karatekelioğlu, P. (2005). Turkey’s EU Candidacy and Civil-Military Relations: Challenges and Prospects. *Armed Forces & Society*, 31(3), 439–462.

<sup>278</sup> Sarigil, 2007, 2.

<sup>279</sup> Sakallioğlu, Ü. C. (1997). The Anatomy of the Turkish Military’s Political Autonomy. *Comparative Politics*, 29(2), 151; Heper, M., & Güney, A. (2000). The Military and the Consolidation of Democracy: The Recent Turkish Experience. *Armed Forces & Society*, 26(4), 635–657.

<sup>280</sup> Kubicek, P. (2005). The European Union and Grassroots Democratization in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 6(3), 368.

<sup>281</sup> Sarigil, 2007, 12.

<sup>282</sup> Schimmelfennig, F. (2003). *The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe: Rules and Rhetoric* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press, 14.

which was regarded as a significant step within the Westernization and modernization process<sup>283</sup>. Indeed, in terms of relations with the West, top military officials repeatedly expressed their commitment to further integration with the EU.<sup>284</sup> This process was also driven by the military's historical background. Indeed, in Turkey, the army is widely regarded as a highly efficient and respected institution, seen by large segments of society as the “guardian of the state's integrity against separatist threats and the protector of secularism and democratic order against Islamic fundamentalism.”<sup>285</sup> By agreeing to the reforms that curtailed its powers, the military sought to avoid being held responsible for obstructing the country's democratization process and its deeper integration with the EU.<sup>286</sup> For instance, retired Air Force Major General Armağan Kuloğlu emphasized that although the MGK reform limited the military's political powers, the military did not block this reform because such an action would damage the military's prestige and credibility. Retired General Halit Edip Başer, former Deputy Chief of the General Staff and former Commander of the Second Army, interestingly stated that:

The generals within Turkish Armed Forces, who are my close friends from military schools and the TSK, expressed their concerns, objections about the MGK reform to government at several times. Despite this, the government pushed for the reform. Then the military had two options: To comply with the reform or to wake up early in the morning and do what is necessary [implying an intervention]. The second option would damage EU accession process and the military would be blamed as an obstacle to further integration with the EU. The military had to opt for the first option.<sup>287</sup>

Even more surprising, General Hilmi Özkök, who served as Chief of the General Staff from 2002 to 2006, was reported to acknowledge that past military interventions were not successful and that the military should place greater trust in civilian politics.<sup>288</sup>

On the other hand, segments of the military strongly criticized the reforms, arguing that they threatened national security rather than merely curbing its own powers.<sup>289</sup> For example, General Tuncer Kılınç, the MGK's Secretary-General at the time, disapproved the reforms by stating that the MGK had been rendered “functionless” and warned that “political Islam and ethnic separatism remain serious threats.” He argued that appointing a civilian secretary-general would politicize the MGK,

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<sup>283</sup> Aydınli, E., Özcan, N. A., & Akyaz, D. (2006). The Turkish Military's March toward Europe. *Foreign Affairs*, 85(1), 77. Scholars of Turkish civil-military relations suggest that the motivation of the Turkish military for coups was not to seize power for the benefit of a group and install an authoritarian regime, but to ‘re-establish’ secular-democratic, constitutional order and prevent the destruction of the state apparatus. See Heper & Güney, 2000, 1.

<sup>284</sup> Sarigil, 2007, 13.

<sup>285</sup> Brown, J. (1989). The Military and Society: The Turkish Case. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 25(3), 400; Demirel, T. (2004). Soldiers and civilians: The dilemma of Turkish democracy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(1), 127–150.

<sup>286</sup> Sarigil, 2007, 13

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Waldman & Çalışkan. 22–24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 19–31.

<sup>289</sup> Heper, 2005.

weakening its effectiveness in safeguarding national security.<sup>290</sup> During debates in the Parliament's Constitutional Commission over the draft law, Mustafa Ağaoğlu, the attendee in the Commission on behalf of the secretary-general of the MGK, reflected the reservations of the military by noting that:

[With the suggested reform], the MGK Secretariat-General is effectively abolished. It will no longer be able to fulfill these three functions: It will not be able to devise psychological operation plans; it will not be able to work on National Security Policy; it will not be able to devise plans for mobilization and war preparations. The MGK Secretariat-General is attached to the Prime Minister's Office. If the Prime Minister assigns it a task, it will fulfill it. Other than that, it never undertakes functions on its own. How will decisions made at the MGK be followed to ensure implementation?<sup>291</sup>

However, the relationship between the AKP and the military remained fraught with tension, particularly over issues of culture and identity, such as lifting the restrictions on headscarves in public institutions or enabling graduates of Imam Hatip schools to enroll in universities. While the military was concerned about the erosion of secularism, the AKP steadily gained ground by promoting policies resonating with a broader population segment. This was also because political Islam in Turkey underwent a significant transformation in the late 1990s, primarily due to mounting pressure from the military and other state institutions, such as the judiciary, and confrontations with secular, republican civil society organizations. Following this transformation, Islamist political groups shifted their previously negative attitudes, adopting a far more supportive stance on Turkey's EU membership.<sup>292</sup> As such, the AKP government coped with these dynamics carefully, striving to maintain a harmonious relationship with the military.<sup>293</sup> The party consciously distanced itself from overt political Islam, avoided confrontations with the military on sensitive issues, and strongly backed Turkey's bid for EU membership. In the Turkish political context, where the strongly secular military has historically been wary of political Islam and maintained a distance from Islamist-oriented political parties and groups,<sup>294</sup> Islamic political groups saw the Europeanization process as a strategic opportunity to diminish the military's political power, thereby promoting religious freedom and increasing the influence of Islamic groups within the political system.<sup>295</sup> Thus, "as culture wars raged on, the AKP gained ground, slowly but steadily, against the military."<sup>296</sup> To put it into the context of the political field battle of power on the "internal level," one can see how

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<sup>290</sup> Quoted in Heper, 38.

<sup>291</sup> Sarigil, 2007, 12-13.

<sup>292</sup> This was covered in the previous chapter dealing with Erbakan's political experience.

<sup>293</sup> Öniş, Z. (2003). Domestic Politics versus Global Dynamics: Towards a Political Economy of the 2000 and 2001 Financial Crises in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 4(2), 17; Mecham, R. Q. (2004). From the Ashes of Virtue, a Promise of Light: The Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 25(2), 339-358.

<sup>294</sup> Taniyıcı, S. (2003). Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: Islamist Welfare Party's Pro-EU Turn. *Party Politics*, 9(4), 463-483; Hale, W. (2003). Human Rights, the European Union and the Turkish Accession Process. *Turkish Studies*, 4(1), 109; Mecham, 2004; Sarigil, 2007, 10.

<sup>295</sup> Özel, S. (2003). Turkey at the Polls: After the Tsunami. *Journal of Democracy*, 14(2), 93.

<sup>296</sup> Interview with an expert on civil-military relations.

the strategy of accumulation of political capital followed by the party represented a certain degree of break from the extant doxa, thus reflecting the heterodox position of the AKP as the vehicle for a gradual “doxic change” within the field. The core of this strategy was the monopolization of the “democratization discourse” by the party, which combined pro-democracy rhetoric with the external pressures exercised on the political field by the EU’s integration process.<sup>297</sup>

### **6.2.3. Consolidation of power and Insulation**

The period from 2007 to 2012 is often considered the peak of the AKP’s golden age. By 2007, the AKP had nearly doubled its support: from 10.81 million ballots in its favor in the 2002 elections to the stunning 19.42 million (a little under 69 %) in the plebiscite of 2007.<sup>298</sup> This era saw the party further solidify its dominance, beginning with the 2009 local elections.<sup>299</sup> Unlike the ANAP in the 1980s and 1990s, the AKP did not experience a gradual erosion of support. This was also clearly demonstrated in the 2011 national elections when Erdoğan’s party achieved its best result, securing nearly 50% of the vote. As such, this strong performance reaffirmed the AKP’s dominant position in Turkish politics during this period. However, this raised concerns among secular segments of Turkish society about the potential Islamization of the country. Certainly, since the party’s rise to power in 2002, there has been an ongoing debate: Was the party genuinely the broad conservative movement it claimed to be, or “was it a wolf in sheep’s clothing, with a secret agenda to turn Turkey into an Islamic state?”<sup>300</sup>

On the one hand, the AKP did not seem to alter the fundamentally secular nature of the political system: Sharia law did not become the basis for legislation; polygamy remained illegal; common-law marriages conducted by imams were not legally recognized; and interest on loans was not banned. Although new legislation enacted after the AKP took complete control of the state in 2007 tended to concentrate power in the executive branch – shifting it away from the legislature – this appeared to be more about consolidating power than promoting religious values. The party’s supporters claimed that conservatism in Turkey also aligns with efforts to preserve the Kemalist status quo.<sup>301</sup> While the AKP sought to transform the political system, its agenda did not aim to challenge the Republic's

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<sup>297</sup> D’Alema, 2024, 9.

<sup>298</sup> For an analysis of the vote, see Çarkoğlu, A. (2008). Ideology or Economic Pragmatism?: Profiling Turkish Voters in 2007. *Turkish Studies*, 9(2), 317–344.

<sup>299</sup> Although the AKP secured 39 % of the vote, making it the largest party once again, Erdoğan expressed some disappointment, though he publicly framed the result as a vote of confidence. The slightly reduced support for the AKP can likely be attributed to two factors. First, while Turkey managed to avoid the worst of the financial crisis, it still felt the impact of the global economic downturn, leading to a sharp rise in unemployment in 2008-2009. Second, the political polarization that had benefited the AKP in 2007, when it positioned itself as the defender of the people against an authoritarian state, had diminished by 2009. Idem.

<sup>300</sup> Zürcher, 2017, 349.

<sup>301</sup> Duran & Kanat, 2020, 12.

founding principles. Instead, the party focused on diminishing Kemalist elitism and tutelage, prioritizing the needs of the people, and transitioning toward a milder, more Anglo-Saxon form of secularism. In this context, the AKP can be seen as fully subscribing to a form of conservatism that aimed to strengthen the state apparatus and push for a restoration of the Republic. Prior to 2013, the AKP viewed democratization and liberalization as means to reinforce the state's structure. In particular, the EU accession process bolstered the government's commitment to democratization. On the other hand, Turkey's sociocultural climate saw significant changes. The new AKP's political leaders increasingly identified as devout Muslims, which exerted pressure on civil servants to conform to the conservative religious norms of the ruling party.<sup>302</sup> With the state's backing, conservative Muslims felt increasingly empowered to impose their standards and values on others. The renowned Turkish sociologist Mardin coined the term "*mahalle baskısı*" (neighborhood pressure) to describe this phenomenon, a concept that resonated strongly among secularists.<sup>303</sup> According to this view, the AKP's ability to maintain its agenda was partly due to the protective cover provided by the EU accession process, which helped the party keep secular-nationalist authoritarianism at bay. This approach contrasted with the ideological stance toward the EU adopted by both Turkey's liberals and Kemalists. For instance, during a meeting on December 3, 2003, according to excerpts allegedly from a diary kept by then Navy Commander Özden Örnek, several top-ranking military officers expressed alarm over an Islamist government they believed was systematically undermining secularism and national unity, with the backing of the US and EU.<sup>304</sup> One General reportedly stated that the government's policies "cannot be prevented with democracy. An alternative is needed." However, Chief of Staff Hilmi Özkök, despite sharing some unease with the AKP, responded, "We'll solve this through democratic means."<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Demonstrating their alignment with these norms involved practices such as having their wives cover their hair, fasting during Ramadan, praying, and abstaining from alcohol. Government offices and public spaces were equipped with prayer rooms, and a strict anti-alcohol policy was enforced through heavy taxes and restrictions on the sale of alcohol. Official receptions increasingly became alcohol-free events. Campaigns were launched against public displays of affection, such as kissing and flirting on public transport, and against unmarried students living together. See Gumuscu, S., & Sert, D. (2009). The Power of the Devout Bourgeoisie: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(6), 953–968.

<sup>303</sup> Mardin, Ş. (1995). *İdeoloji* (3. baskı). İletişim Yayınları. For a discussion, see Çetin, A. (2011). Bir Kavramın Kısa Tarihi: Mahalle Baskısı. *Mukaddime*, 3(3), 81–92.

<sup>304</sup> See, in particular, the comments made by Generals Yaşar Büyükanıt and Hurşit Tolon. The diary extracts were published by Nokta magazine in 2007 and reproduced online by Taraf newspaper (unavailable since 2016, see Avşar, G., Özdiş, K., & Kırmızıdağ, N. (2013). *Ergenekon'un Öteki Yüzü: Faili Meçhuller ve Kayıplar. Rapor Özeti*. TESEV). Although Nokta's editor Ahmet Alper Görmüş insisted they were genuine, claiming that a source within the TSK had downloaded the document from Örnek's personal computer, Admiral Örnek himself denied it. Turkish media have since reported Büyükanıt as confirming he was quoted correctly in the document and former Chief of Staff Özkök as verifying the main features of the "coup diaries." See Kurt, N. (2008, July 8). Arşivinde Yaşar Paşa belgeleri. *Hürriyet*. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/arsivinde-yasar-pasa-belgeleri-9380225>; NTV. (2011, August 17). *Darbe Günlükleri—2*. <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/darbe-gunlukleri-2,zz8TP9aUMeyNNXxxemUlwg>.

<sup>305</sup> Idem. On dissatisfaction with Özkök see Çölaşan, E. (2003, March 27). Kuzey Irak'tan Dışlandık. *Hürriyet*. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/emin-colasan/?p=152>; Haber7. (2011, November 19). "*Genç Subaylar*" manşeti neden atıldı? <https://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/455225-genc-subaylar-manseti-neden-atildi>. See also Jenkins, G. (2007). Continuity and change: Prospects for civil—military relations in Turkey. *International Affairs*, 83(2), 339–355.

As has often been the case in Turkey's history, a division emerged between hardliners, who pushed for immediate intervention, and senior commanders, who advocated restraint. This time, however, the differences were not just about temperament but reflected a more profound split in the security establishment's view. Confronted by the social and electoral changes that had brought the AKP to power, some military leaders, like General Özkök, began acknowledging these shifts, with Özkök himself noting, "There is a Kurdish reality. A segment of our people identifies itself as of Kurdish extraction. This is a truth."<sup>306</sup> In contrast, the hardliners viewed such accommodation as a betrayal of their core political and strategic principles. Admiral Örnek's alleged diary suggests that by late 2003, all four force commanders began suspecting that Özkök might sympathize with the AKP, believing his occasional criticisms of its policies were mere tactics to appease and neutralize military resistance. Urged by Gendarmerie Commander Şener Eruygur, they discussed the feasibility of a military coup. However, Örnek and Army Commander Aytaç Yalman eventually abandoned the coup plans in 2004, anticipating a lack of support from both the Turkish public and the US government.<sup>307</sup>

A clear example of such contrasts was the process of the election of Abdullah Gül to the Presidency in 2007. Under the 1961 and 1982 Constitutions, Turkish Presidents were unofficially expected to adhere to strict secular and nationalist ideals.<sup>308</sup> This unwritten rule allowed the secularist establishment to exert considerable influence over the selection of presidential candidates, ensuring that only those who met these ideological criteria could ascend to the role. As the 2007 presidential election approached, the secularist establishment became increasingly anxious about the possibility of an Islamist candidate from the AKP taking the Presidency. To preempt this possibility, different forces began discussing the 2007 election as early as 2005, aiming to create a climate of opposition to any AKP nominee. One of the first strategies was to argue that the Turkish Parliament, dominated by the AKP, should not conduct the presidential election so close to the next general elections scheduled for 2007. This argument, prominently advanced by the then-CHP chairman Deniz Baykal and other secular leaders, aimed to force early general elections in the hope that the AKP would lose its parliamentary majority. A second and more culturally charged line of attack focused on the fact that Abdullah Gül's wife, Hayrünnisa Gül, wore a headscarf – a symbol seen by many secularists as emblematic of political Islam. Baykal and other secularist figures claimed the AKP was attempting

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<sup>306</sup> Quoted in Bilâ, 2007, 213.

<sup>307</sup> Quoted in Mufti, 2009, 149.

<sup>308</sup> Zürcher, 2017, 343.

to “make the headscarf official” and integrate it into Turkey’s constitutional order.<sup>309</sup> The campaign against Gül’s candidacy reached a new level of intensity with the organization of the so-called Republican Rallies.<sup>310</sup> These mass demonstrations, which began on April 14, 2007, were mobilized by secularist leaders like Baykal, who called on non-governmental organizations and the public to protest against the AKP’s candidate and – in some cases – to urge the military to intervene. The rallies, which drew hundreds of thousands of participants in cities like Ankara and Istanbul, were marked by chants of “*Türkiye laiktir laik kalacak*” (Turkey is secular and will remain secular) that echoed the deep fear among secularists that an AKP Presidency would lead to the Islamization of the state.<sup>311</sup> Amidst this escalating tension, a legal controversy known as the “367 crisis” emerged, further complicating the presidential election. Pro-establishment figures argued that a quorum of 367 parliamentarians – two-thirds of the total – was required for the presidential election to proceed.<sup>312</sup> This interpretation, first suggested by former chief prosecutor Sabih Kanadoğlu and quickly adopted by other secularist figures, was unprecedented and had not been applied in previous elections. The military reportedly pressured opposition parties, particularly the ANAP, to boycott the parliamentary session, ensuring that the quorum was not met.<sup>313</sup> As a result, the first round of voting, in which Gül received 357 votes, was declared invalid by the Constitutional Court, which ruled in favor of the quorum requirement. This decision underscored the judiciary’s alignment with secularist interests and its role in the broader struggle against the AKP.

The military’s involvement in this crisis peaked on April 27, 2007, when the Turkish Armed Forces issued an “e-memorandum” on its official website.<sup>314</sup> The memorandum, a stark reminder of the military’s stance on the February 28 process, expressed the TSK’s concern over the presidential election and its readiness to intervene in civilian politics to protect the secular nature of the state. The statement declared that “the Turkish Armed Forces are a party to said debate and a clear guardian of

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<sup>309</sup> In an extreme move, there were even discussions within the secularist establishment about the legal feasibility of putting the future President on trial for treason if his wife wore the headscarf, underscoring the lengths to which they were willing to go to prevent an AKP-affiliated President.

<sup>310</sup> Zürcher, 2017, 343-44.

<sup>311</sup> Civil society organizations such as the Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği (Atatürkist Thought Association) and Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği (Association in Support of Contemporary Life), organized a massive demonstration in Ankara’s Tandoğan Square on April 14, 2007,<sup>14</sup> intending to protect Republican values (e.g. secularism) and of protesting Erdoğan’s potential candidacy. Predominant among the protesters were slogans in favor of the military, such as “*Orduya uzanan eller kırılсын*” (Down with the hands that encroach on the army), “*Mustafa Kemal’in askerleriyiz*” (We are soldiers of Mustafa Kemal), and “*En büyük asker bizim asker*” (The greatest military is our military). See Haberler. (2007, April 14). *Cumhuriyet Mitingi’ne Yüzbinler Akan Etti*.

<sup>312</sup> For a complete account, see MacLean, G. M. (2014). *Abdullah Gül & the making of the new Turkey*. Oneworld.

<sup>313</sup> At the time, the military reportedly pressured ANAP chairman Erkan Mumcu not to attend the parliamentary session. Asked by a fellow party member why the ANAP caucus did not participate in the presidential election, Mumcu allegedly said that “the military had already determined whom they would take and where those people would be forcibly taken if we attended the session and [Gül] became President. See Sarıkaya, M. (2008, April 26). *Seni De Beni De Götürecekler*. *Sabah*.

<sup>314</sup> The memorandum stated: “In recent days, the problems that emerged in the presidential election process have concentrated on a debate on secularism. This situation is being monitored by the Turkish Armed Forces with concern. It must not be forgotten that the Turkish Armed Forces are a party to said debate and a clear guardian of secularism. Moreover, the Turkish Armed Forces ... shall make perfectly clear its position and actions when necessary. See Yeni Şafak. (2007, May 1). *Cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinin 1. Turu iptal*.

secularism” and warned that the military would “clarify its position and actions when necessary.”<sup>315</sup> The authorship and authorization of the e-memorandum have been subjects of speculation, with accounts suggesting it was hastily prepared under pressure from hardline factions within the military. General Büyükanıt, presumed to be the author, rarely mentioned it afterward, raising further questions about its origins. Indeed, the e-memorandum did not ultimately impact the outcome of the presidential election, nor did it signal a continued confrontational stance from Büyükanıt, who later cooperated with civilian leadership. Instead, the memorandum seemed to have been an effort to appease the absolutist elements within the military, reflecting the internal divide between hardliners and those more inclined toward gradual cooperation with civilian authorities.<sup>316</sup> As such, unlike previous military interventions, the AKP government responded assertively, bolstered by its electoral mandate. On April 28, 2007, the day after the e-memorandum was issued, the party released a sharply worded statement emphasizing that the military was subordinate to the civilian government and that it was unacceptable in a democracy for the military to criticize its government.<sup>317</sup> This confrontation marked a significant departure from past military-civilian dynamics in Turkey, signaling the AKP’s growing confidence and its determination to assert civilian supremacy over the military. Following the Constitutional Court’s decision to annul the first round of the presidential election and the ensuing political deadlock, the AKP called for early general elections, which were held on July 22, 2007. The AKP emerged from the elections with a resounding victory, securing 46.6% of the vote – an increase from its previous performance. This electoral success provided the AKP with a renewed mandate, which it interpreted as public support for its policies, including its choice of Gül as the presidential candidate. Subsequently, Gül was elected President on August 28, 2007, in a parliamentary vote where the required quorum was finally met.<sup>318</sup> Overall, the election of Abdullah Gül and the events surrounding it marked a turning point in Turkish politics. The secularist establishment, including the military, judiciary, and opposition parties, faced a severe challenge to its control over the Presidency. Despite their concerted efforts, they could not prevent the AKP from securing the Presidency, a development that underscored Turkey’s shifting balance of power. The AKP’s ability to steer this

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<sup>315</sup> Aydınli, E. (2010). Governments vs States: Decoding dual governance in the developing world. *Third World Quarterly*, 31(5), 693–707.

<sup>316</sup> See Aydınli, 2011, 238.

<sup>317</sup> Idem.

<sup>318</sup> In response to the crisis and to prevent similar confrontations in the future, the AKP government proposed significant constitutional amendments. These amendments, approved in a national referendum on October 21, 2007, fundamentally altered the presidential election process. The reforms included provisions for the direct election of the President by the public, a reduction in the presidential term from seven to five years, and the possibility of re-election. Additionally, the amendments reduced the parliamentary term from five to four years. Despite opposition from secularist parties and the refusal of then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer to sign the amendments, the Constitutional Court upheld the changes, paving the way for a more democratized Presidency and reducing the likelihood of future political crises arising from parliamentary elections of the President.



crisis and ultimately prevail demonstrated its growing political dominance and the declining influence of the secularist elite. This period also marked the beginning of the end for military and judicial tutelage in Turkish politics, as the AKP, now firmly in control, began to reshape the political milieu according to its vision.

However, the challenge to the government from the judicial authorities was not over.<sup>319</sup> In February 2008, the AKP, with the support of the MHP, passed a controversial constitutional amendment to lift the ban on headscarves in universities. Secularists, especially those aligned with Kemalist principles, viewed this as a direct challenge to the secular nature of the Turkish Republic. The CHP quickly responded by challenging the amendment in the Constitutional Court, which annulled it, using its powers in a way that extended beyond what many considered its constitutional mandate. This legal confrontation over the headscarf was part of a broader series of clashes between the AKP and the secularist establishment. In March 2008, the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Court of Cassation escalated the conflict by filing a case to dissolve the AKP, accusing it of becoming the “focus of activities” aimed at undermining the secular character of the Republic. Chief State Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya on 14 March 2008 petitioned the Constitutional Court to close down the AKP and to ban Erdogan, Gül, and 69 of their senior colleagues from politics for five years. However, while the Court narrowly avoided banning the AKP by a single vote, in the end, it opted to issue a warning to the party. This outcome was seen as a compromise, reflecting the precarious balance of power between the AKP and the secular institutions of the state.<sup>320</sup> Feeling reinforced by winning its battle against the old establishment, the AKP policymakers chose to suppress domestic opponents by targeting the military. In addition, its confidence was also boosted and somehow justified by the EU Commission Progress Report, published on 5 November 2009, pinpointing the ambiguous nature of political control over the military.<sup>321</sup>

A final blow on these issues came with the Balyoz Operation and Ergenekon investigations<sup>322</sup>, which began in 2007 and targeted members of an alleged clandestine network within the military and

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<sup>319</sup> On the following issues, see Turan, I. (2023). Never quite making it: Turkey’s repeated attempts at political democracy. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 451–475. See also Zürcher, 2017; Mufti, 2009.

<sup>320</sup> The CHP attempted to block the passage of amendments in Parliament, as well as through appeals to the Constitutional Court. For a detailed account, see Migdalovitz, C. (2007). *Turkey’s 2007 Elections: Crisis of Identity and Power*. Congressional Research Service, US Congress. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RL34039.pdf>.

<sup>321</sup> To quote “[...]which] was applied in practice in the context of military operations aimed at terrorist targets in Northern Iraq. Such operations were authorized by the Parliament and decided upon by the government. Overall, however, no progress has been made in ensuring full civilian supervisory functions over the military and parliamentary oversight of defence expenditure. Senior members of the armed forces have made statements on issues going beyond their remit. No progress has been made on strengthening parliamentary oversight of the military budget and expenditure. See a critical approach in Cizre, U., & Walker, J. (2010). Conceiving the New Turkey After Ergenekon. *The International Spectator*, 45(1), 92.

<sup>322</sup> Since the 1970s, there has been awareness of an underground network in Turkey, known as *kontragerilla*, comprising militias, security services, and military officers. This network was involved in suppressing the radical left. In the 1980s, a gendarmerie officer,

nationalist circles accused of plotting to overthrow the government.<sup>323</sup> The Ergenekon investigation started with the discovery of a cache of explosives in Istanbul in June 2007, which led to a broader probe into what was described as a “deep state” (*derin devlet*) network. This network, known collectively as Ergenekon, was alleged to have included military officers, journalists, and academics who were involved in a conspiracy against the AKP government.<sup>324</sup> The Balyoz (Sledgehammer) case, which came to light in 2010, further intensified the scrutiny of the military. Based on documents that purportedly detailed a military coup plan dating back to 2003, the case led to the arrest and trial of numerous senior military officers.<sup>325</sup> Although the authenticity of the evidence was later questioned, and some documents were proven to be forgeries, the trials nonetheless resulted in harsh sentences for many high-ranking officers.<sup>326</sup> The trials had far-reaching implications for the military’s role in Turkish politics. The prosecution of senior military officers, including former Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ and other top commanders, was unprecedented. On one level, “the crackdown reflected push-back by the AKP to the secularist campaign against it – a notable difference from the passivity with which Erbakan’s RP had succumbed in 1997-1998 and a testament to Turkey’s shifting political balance of power.”<sup>327</sup> As Mufti notes, “The pashas, who until recently had been completely untouchable in Turkey, [found] this was traumatic, but the whole officer corps seemed paralyzed and demoralized by the long, drawn out trials and all the publicity.”<sup>328</sup> The culmination of these events came in July 2011, when the Chief of the General Staff, General Işık Koşaner, along with the commanders of the army, navy, and air force, resigned in protest over the government’s refusal to

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Veli Küçük, reorganized this group under the name JİTEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counterterrorism), and it became primarily active in the 1980s and 1990s during the “dirty war” against the Kurdish PKK. The 1997 Susurluk scandal revealed ties between JİTEM, right-wing militants, and the government of Tansu Çiller, exposing more details about this illegal network, which became known as the “deep state.” The term “Ergenekon,” an ultranationalist name for the Turks’ mythical homeland, was first used in 1997 to describe this illegal network. It resurfaced in June 2007 when police discovered a stash of explosives in a retired officer’s house in Istanbul. The investigation linked this to an older file from 2001 involving Tuncay Güney, a journalist who turned out to be a double agent for JİTEM and the national security service, MİT. The 2007 prosecution connected the explosives discovery to Ergenekon and suggested that the network was involved in conspiracies aimed at overthrowing the AKP government. The network was also linked to the murders of Hrant Dink, an Armenian Turkish editor, and three Christian publishers in 2007. Subsequent investigations led to the arrest of 275 prominent individuals, including retired officers, journalists, and academics, in multiple waves between 2008 and 2009. See Demiroz, F., & Kapucu, N. (2012). Anatomy of a dark network: the case of the Turkish Ergenekon terrorist organization. *Trends in organized crime*, 15, 271-295.

<sup>323</sup> The compromise solution appears in a document published in June 2008 by the liberal newspaper Taraf which described it as a strategy draft prepared by the TSK General Staff, and leaked by dissident elements – outlining a propaganda campaign to mobilize civilian elements for a “judicial putsch” designed to minimize the impression of an outright coup. Taraf editor Yasemin Çongar, interviewed by Steinvorth, D. (2008, June 24). “Erdogan Is to Be Toppled.” *Spiegel*. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-generals-secret-plan-erdogan-is-to-be-toppled-a-561774.html>.

<sup>324</sup> While the police and public prosecution services were undertaking these actions, the media, or at least some media, were also playing an important role. Some of the left-wing liberal media, like Nokta (Point) and Taraf (Side), which were strongly antagonistic to the Kemalist state’s army and security services, acquired important and explosive information.

<sup>325</sup> These documents suggested that the military intended to orchestrate fundamentalist attacks and even considered downing a Turkish fighter jet to justify taking control of the government. “The army, which denied the existence of the plan, claimed that some of the documents referred to regular army exercises.” See Kaya, S. (2009). The rise and decline of the Turkish “deep state”: the Ergenekon case. *Insight Turkey*, 99-113.

<sup>326</sup> Idem. See also Jenkins 2007; Cizre & Walker, 2010.

<sup>327</sup> Mufti, 2009, 171.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

promote generals implicated in the Balyoz case. This mass resignation was a critical moment in civil-military relations, effectively ending the military's role as a significant political force. President Abdullah Gül swiftly appointed General Necdet Özel as the new Chief of General Staff, ensuring the military remained under firm civilian control. By 2013, with the amendment of Article 35 of the military's Internal Service Law – which had previously “justified” military interventions in politics – the transformation of civil-military relations in Turkey reached an unprecedented level. The military, once a powerful guardian of secularism and frequent intervener in Turkish politics, had been relegated to a purely defensive role, with the AKP firmly in control of the state apparatus. As such, the army was no longer an independent countervailing force against the elected politicians, marking a definitive shift in the power dynamics that had long defined Turkish politics.<sup>329</sup> And as Bechev aptly resumes,

from the perspective of the time, the choice between the backward-looking and at times xenophobic Republican People's Party and the AKP, which put forward a democratic and pro-European agenda was therefore clear-cut. While Baykal and his associates stood for the *ancien régime*, Erdoğan and Gül spoke the language of political liberties, democratic participation and Europeanization. It is no surprise that Western governments and individual observers following Turkey from the outside fell for the AKP narrative. There was simply nothing else on offer.<sup>330</sup>

Seemingly, right after the events, a famous expert of Turkey's civil-military relations was writing that

the case itself, the division in the military that it has helped to further reveal, and the informal pacts that have continued to emerge throughout the investigation, have nevertheless helped to contribute to arguably irreversible changes in the mindset of critical segments of the Turkish elite and society with respect to the role of the army in a liberal democracy. These changes are keys not just to understanding why the military has acquiesced with the Ergenekon investigation, but also to grasping the new pattern of civil-military relations in Turkey. “As a whole, large segments of Turkish elite and society, from large and small businesspeople, lay people and intellectuals, to liberals and nationalists, appear now united in their condemnation of the unaccountable, invisible “inner state”—the realm of the absolutist circles.”<sup>331</sup>

Accordingly, as the following section explores, “that new era of pacts seemed to be one of multiplicity, in which the actors are numerous, heterogeneous and evolving – just like the new face of Turkey itself, a new Turkey in which the state does not own the society, but society, with all its competing elements and actors, may very well own the state.”<sup>332</sup>

#### **6.2.3.1. The Renovated Importance of Civil Society and Public Opinion**

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<sup>329</sup> Cizre & Walker, 2010; Aydınli, 2011.

<sup>330</sup> Bechev, 2022, 47.

<sup>331</sup> Aydınli, 2011, 236.

<sup>332</sup> Idem.

Already in the 1990s, there was considerable debate about whether Turkey was developing a civil society comparable to those in Western democracies, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as business associations, trade unions, and voluntary groups, were beginning to play a more significant role in the country's politics.<sup>333</sup> Among these, business associations like the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD) and the Union of Chambers (TTOBB) were likely the most influential. These groups, along with the two major labor confederations, Türk-İş and DİSK, generally supported pro-Western and anti-Islamist stances. Meanwhile, the Islamist nationalists had their own business association, MÜSİAD, and labor confederation, Hak-İş. Additionally, there were emerging lobbies representing people of specific ethnic origins within Turkey, such as Kurds, Bulgarians, Bosnians, Chechens, and Abkhazians.<sup>334</sup> However, under the AKP, NGOs with clearly Islamist sympathies began to have a significant impact on Turkey's international relations. During the party's golden era, Turkey underwent a significant transformation in the role of civil society and public opinion, which increasingly shaped the country's political and foreign policy environment. One of the concepts that captured the spirit of this period was that of "Islamic Calvinists," which described a new class of capitalists and entrepreneurs emerging from central Anatolia.<sup>335</sup> Born in the "Anatolian Tigers" tradition, these individuals were deeply rooted in Islamic tradition while fully integrated into the global market economy, symbolizing the economic dynamism and cultural transformation that the AKP embraced and promoted as part of its narrative. Then, also part of the liberal intelligentsia in Turkey, fluent in Western languages, often educated abroad, and part of international networks, sided fully with the AKP, especially during the face-off with the military and the Kemalist establishment around 2007-2008.<sup>336</sup> They saw the party as the vehicle for Turkey's liberalization and integration into Europe as well as for coming to terms with the country's traumatic past. The influential TÜSİAD offered support, too, on account of the government's pro-EU agenda.<sup>337</sup> Moreover, civil society in Turkey was greatly empowered by the EU accession process. As its prospects for membership became more tangible, civil society organizations gained increased legitimacy and momentum in advocating for democratic reforms.

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<sup>333</sup> Göle, N. (1994). Towards an Autonomization of Politics and Civil Society in Turkey. In M. Heper & A. Evin (Eds.), *Politics in the third Turkish Republic*. Westview Press; White, J. B. (1996). Civic Culture and Islam in Urban Turkey. In C. M. Hann & E. Dunn (Eds.), *Civil society: Challenging western models*. Routledge.

<sup>334</sup> However, the influence of these groups, particularly in times of crisis, varied, especially concerning Turkey's relations with Russia and its policies in the Balkans. Other ethnic organizations, like those of Uighur refugees from China's Xinjiang province, had only occasional impact. Environmental NGOs, such as the Turkish branch of Greenpeace, also played a role, notably in protesting the passage of large oil tankers through the Bosphorus.

<sup>335</sup> A term popularized by the European Stability Initiative. See ESI, 2005.

<sup>336</sup> See Onar, N. (2007). Kemalists, Islamists, and Liberals: Shifting Patterns of Confrontation and Consensus, 2002–06. *Turkish Studies*, 8(2), 273–288.

<sup>337</sup> The AKP also had strong backing from MÜSİAD.

These organizations were diverse, encompassing liberal, left-wing, and religiously inspired groups, each pursuing different, sometimes overlapping, agendas such as civil rights, socio-political rights, religious freedoms, and environmental concerns. In this sense, the EU's influence was crucial in providing an external ally to these domestic actors, enabling them to push for changes that might have been difficult to achieve otherwise.<sup>338</sup> Public opinion also became a more significant force in shaping Turkey's policies during the AKP era. While traditionally focused on domestic issues like the economy, public sentiment increasingly influenced foreign policy decisions, especially when these intersected with national security concerns or received extensive media coverage.<sup>339</sup>

Since coming to power in 2002, AKP governments have transferred public assets worth \$62 billion US to private hands under very favorable terms. Such privatizations have paved the way for entities with the right political connections to receive lucrative business deals in such sectors as energy, tourism, construction, and health care.<sup>340</sup> The AKP government also used the privatization of state assets and state-owned industries to direct the capital accumulation process, including the establishment of legal and institutional conditions that ensured the support and loyalty of the capital groups that benefited. One-quarter of public spending has been devoted to public procurement bids, accounting for up to 8.5% of the national GDP.<sup>341</sup> In addition, Yavuz noted that "Islam has become the oppositional identity for the excluded sectors of Turkish society."<sup>342</sup> This oppositional identity began searching more actively for its share in the political and economic arena, and MÜSİAD became an important symbol of this search in the business world. Active in more than 60 countries and representing more than 8,000 members and almost 36,000 businesses with a combined labor force of 1.6 million, its member companies account for 18 % of Turkey's GNP, while its exports have reached a remarkable \$17 billion dollars. The organization MÜSİAD still has branches and partners not only in countries with predominantly Muslim populations but also in Europe, with offices in numerous cities, including Munich, London, Copenhagen, Brussels, Paris, and Milan. It also has US branches, in Washington DC and New Jersey.<sup>343</sup> With the AKP's first election victory in 2002, more than

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<sup>338</sup> Denemeç, R. (2004). The Influence of Civil Societies on Governments. In N. Tocci & A. Evin (Eds.), *Towards Accession Negotiations: Turkey's Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges Ahead*. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, EUI, 15-17.

<sup>339</sup> For example, the strong public opposition to the US. invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the Turkish Parliament's unexpected refusal to allow US troops to use Turkish territory to enter northern Iraq. This decision, which defied the government's reluctant support for the U.S., highlighted the increasing power of public opinion in influencing key policy decisions. Similarly, the widespread public outrage over events like the Israeli bombardment of Gaza and the attack on the Turkish aid ship Mavi Marmara in 2010 reinforced Erdoğan's anti-Israeli rhetoric and made it politically challenging to restore close relations with Israel. See Metropoll. (2010). *Türkiye Siyasal Durum Araştırması—Aralık 2011*. <https://www.metropoll.com.tr/arastirmalar/siyasi-arastirma-9/1709>.

<sup>340</sup> Buğra, A., & Savaşkan, O. (2014). *New capitalism in Turkey: The relationship between politics, religion and business*. Edward Elgar, 82.

<sup>341</sup> Gürakar, E. Ç. (2016). Politics of favoritism in public procurement in Turkey: Reconfigurations of dependency networks in the AKP era. Palgrave Macmillan, 72.

<sup>342</sup> Yavuz, M. H. (2000). Cleansing Islam from the Public Sphere. *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), 22.

<sup>343</sup> See MÜSİAD webpage, "Branches", <http://www.musiad.org.tr/en/branches>.

twenty MÜSİAD members became MPs. In the 2009 local elections, MÜSİAD succeeded in electing some of its members as district mayors in several cities including Sakarya, Gaziantep, İstanbul and Kayseri, as well as a metropolitan mayor in Kayseri and a town mayor in Malatya. In 2007, 30 MÜSİAD members became AKP MPs. In 2011, this number was 26. By 2010, reportedly, the Turkish business world experienced a “conservative rise” since 70 out of 500 industrial companies were members of either MÜSİAD or TUSKON. MÜSİAD grew from 1,800 to 6,500 members, employing some 1.2 million workers and accounting for 15% of Turkey’s national income. TUSKON grew from 12,000 members to 34,000 in the same period.<sup>344</sup>

TUSKON, another significant business association, saw its influence rise during the AKP era until the 2013 Erdoğan-Gülen split, which led to a hostile relationship between the two.<sup>345</sup> Serving as the umbrella organization for seven regional federations corresponding to Turkey’s seven geographical regions, TUSKON represented 211 voluntary business associations and around 55,000 entrepreneurs. Established in 2005, TUSKON aimed to integrate the Turkish economy and its businessmen into the global economy, playing a crucial role in fostering economic ties with neighboring regions and expanding Turkey’s reach to Latin America and Africa. TUSKON’s activities were supported by the Turkish government, with Prime Minister Erdoğan often praising the organization’s efforts abroad. The organization’s head, Rızanur Meral, acknowledged the conservative leanings of many TUSKON members but avoided labeling the organization as “conservative.”<sup>346</sup> He emphasized the positive relationship between TUSKON and the AKP as a key factor in the organization’s success. Encouraged by the Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade, the Turkish Exporters Assembly, and Prime Minister Erdoğan, TUSKON expanded its activities to establish new trade connections with markets in Latin America, Africa, and the former Soviet region. TUSKON’s principal events, the “Foreign Trade Bridge” meetings, were similar to MÜSİAD’s International Business Fairs and attracted significant participation. The first Foreign Trade Bridge summit in 2009, for instance, brought together over 5000 businessmen from more than 130 countries. Since 2006, TUSKON has organized trade summits with Eurasian, Asia-Pacific, and African countries, significantly boosting Turkey’s trade with Africa—. TUSKON played a pivotal role in this growth by conducting economic activities in African countries<sup>347</sup> and promoting further expansion through delegations and meetings like its World Trade Bridge. In 2010 and 2011, two Trade Bridge

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<sup>344</sup> Akça, I., Bekmen, A., & Özden, B. A. (Eds.). (2015). *Turkey Reframed: Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony*. Pluto Press.

<sup>345</sup> Before falling out with the AKP and Erdoğan, the pro-Gülen companies affiliated with TUSKON had received a generous share of public procurement bids between 2004 and 2011. See Esen & Gumuscu, 2018, 361.

<sup>346</sup> Atlı, A. (2011). Businessmen as Diplomats: The Role of Business Associations in Turkey’s Foreign Economic Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), 116.

<sup>347</sup> Bilateral trade went from \$5.4 billion in 2003 to \$17 billion in 2012.

summits focused solely on Africa, attracting over 1000 participants from more than 40 countries. In 2012, TUSKON launched three ambitious projects – Turkey-Africa, Turkey-Pacific, and Turkey-Eurasia – to deepen trade relationships and diversify Turkey's bilateral trade and investment portfolio.<sup>348</sup>

Within this context, the role of the *Hizmet* movement, led by Fethullah Gülen, was particularly significant during this period. Originating in the educational sector and the Nakşibendi order, the Hizmet movement expanded into a vast global network that included schools, media outlets, and businesses. Its funder, Fethullah Gülen, headed one of the “quasi-Sufi Nurcu movements inspired by Said Nursi’s teachings,” led a group that numbered between two and six million followers.<sup>349</sup> To some members of Turkey’s Republican establishment, such as retired Air Force General Sadi Ergüvenç, who noted that “religion in Turkey is a very powerful institution, more powerful than is realized,” Gülen was seen as a figure to be coopted rather than opposed.<sup>350</sup> However, others viewed his rising public influence as a significant threat. This latter perspective gained the upper hand when authorities discovered a videotape in which Gülen seemed to advise his followers to maintain a low profile while entering the civil service, warning that if “they...come out early, the world will crush their heads. Let us not experience the same situation that occurred in Algeria.”<sup>351</sup>

Nonetheless, by the early 2000s, the movement had cultivated a large cadre of well-educated professionals who began to occupy key positions within the Turkish state apparatus after the AKP’s rise to power.<sup>352</sup> Hence, Gülen had eschewed mainstream politics but successfully amassed an extremely influential network within government institutions, becoming what Watmough and Oztürk

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<sup>348</sup> Özkan, M. (2013). Turkey’s Religious and Socio-Political Depth in Africa" Emerging Powers in Africa. In C. Alden (Ed.), *Emerging Powers in Africa*, 46.

<sup>349</sup> The Nurcus advocated a uniquely Turkish expression of Islam, distinct from what they viewed as a 'tribal Arab' version. It is important to note that the GM had come from a different religious and political tradition than the AKP. The new party had evolved from the mainstream Refah Partisi (RP – Welfare Party), the Milli Görüş (National Vision), the movement of Necmettin Erbakan, and the teachings of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, which saw Muslim Turks as victims of the ‘West’ epitomized by the Kemalist elite. Whilst the GM and the AKP were each working towards the same end—reclaiming a place for religion in Turkish politics—they came from different philosophical and theological traditions—and had different political strategies. The GM worked from within the Kemalist state institutions whilst the RP had sought to challenge Kemalist political actors at the ballot box. Yavuz, M. H. (2018). A Framework for Understanding the Intra-Islamist Conflict Between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 19(1), 11–32. See also Yavuz, M. H., & Esposito, J. L. (Eds.). (2003). *Turkish Islam and the secular state: The Gülen movement* (1st ed). Syracuse University Press.

<sup>350</sup> Ergüvenç, Ş. (1998). Turkey’s security perceptions. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 3(2).

<sup>351</sup> Quoted in Yavuz, & Esposito, 2003. These remarks were interpreted as an incitement to subversion, leading a State Security Court Prosecutor to initiate legal proceedings against Gülen, with charges that could have resulted in a prison sentence of up to ten years. Consequently, Gülen went into exile in the United States, which further fueled hardline secularist suspicions that Washington was plotting to undermine the Kemalist order. See, for example, Dura & Kılıçarslan, who describe Gülen as “an agent of influence in a broader American plot to promote moderate Islam in order to establish a mandate over Turkey and to project US influence into the Middle East and the formerly Soviet Eurasian heartland.” Dura, C., & Kılıçarslan, Z. (2011). *Ulusötesi Şirketler ve Ulus Devlet: Güç Kayması Üzerine Bir Araştırma. Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 1(31), 11–37.

<sup>352</sup> Martin, N. (2022). Allies and enemies: The Gülen movement and the AKP. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 35(1), 112.

describe as “parapolitical.”<sup>353</sup> In this regard, what the Gülen Movement (GM) represented in Turkey is still a source of debate. It is argued here that before 2002 and the “marriage of convenience” with the AKP, the GM was a non-state actor at odds with the Kemalist establishment because it still lacked the capacity to effect change easily because of the Kemalist hold on state politics written into law by the 1982 Constitution. However, in tandem with the AKP, the GM succeeded in muting the power of its rival. In so doing, “it transitioned from a non-state actor to a covert state actor by proxy – a quasi-state actor. The GM movement has always been political but had chosen a covert long-term strategy.”<sup>354</sup> The Gülen followers evolved through three major stages of development: a communitarian network of piety (*cemaat*); education-cum-media global movement (*hareket*), and a secret religiopolitical configuration commonly referred to as a “parallel structure of the state” (*parallel yapı*), to control the mechanisms of the state.<sup>355</sup> Hence, the Gülenists gradually shed their faith-oriented activities, involving themselves in conquering secular spaces by articulating a new Islamic discourse, which stressed “service” (*hizmet*) to humanity, rigorous educational standards for a new generation who eventually would rule the country, and involvement in strategic economic sectors to leverage new financial and market power.<sup>356</sup>

The relationship between the AKP and the Hizmet movement was initially symbiotic.<sup>357</sup> The former, which emerged from a base of small traders and urban migrants, lacked the well-educated professionals needed to fill the ranks of the state bureaucracy, while the latter, which had faced suspicion and repression from the secular establishment in the 1990s, gained greater acceptance and moral support under the AKP government.<sup>358</sup> This relationship was mutually beneficial for a time. The AKP needed the expertise and influence of Hizmet members to solidify its control over the state apparatus, particularly in the judiciary, police, and public administration, which were still dominated by Kemalist elements. In return, the Gülen movement, which had traditionally focused on education, media, and business, was able to expand its influence within the state by raising a new like-minded

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<sup>353</sup> Defined as “a manifestation of deep and complicated politics in which all political activities, arrangements, and aims – deliberate or otherwise – are hidden, rather than acknowledged.” See Watmough, S. P., & Öztürk, A. E. (2018). From ‘Diaspora by Design’ to Transnational Political Exile: The Gülen Movement in Transition. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 19(1), 33–52.

<sup>354</sup> Martin, N. 2022, 116

<sup>355</sup> There are several different approaches to outlining the periods of development within the Gülen movement. This particular period structure is based on the movement’s evolving relationship with politics and development of its political objectives. For a different perspective on periodization, see Tittensor, D. (2014). *The House of Service: The Gülen Movement and Islam’s Third Way*. Oxford University Press, 71. Tittensor introduces three distinct stages, arguing: “(1) the 1960 and 1970s were years of religious community building; (2) the 1980s witnessed domestic community expansion, and lastly (3) in the 1990s a global vision was born that instigated rapid expansion.”

<sup>356</sup> Yavuz, 2018, 19.

<sup>357</sup> Taş, H. (2018). A history of Turkey’s AKP-Gülen conflict. *Mediterranean Politics*, 23(3), 395-402; Kuru, A. T. (2007). Changing perspectives on islamism and secularism in Turkey: The Gülen Movement and the AK Party. *Muslim world in transition: Contributions of the Gülen movement*, 140-51.

<sup>358</sup> Hale, 2012, 149.



cadre in relevant spots.<sup>359</sup> The movement's schools, which promoted conservative values and high academic standards, played a key role in shaping a new generation of Turkish professionals aligned with the AKP's vision of blending Islamic values with a capitalist economy. To put it in Zubaida's terms, the key difference between Erdoğan and Gülen lied in their respective "field" of influence.<sup>360</sup> Erdoğan operated primarily in the political sphere, while Gülen's influence was rooted in the social realm. Although both movements – political in Erdoğan's case and socio-cultural in Gülen's – have collaborated, they did not always align in their worldviews, especially regarding Turkey's role on the international stage. Gülen's faction was decidedly pro-American, whereas Erdoğan advocated for a more independent international stance for Turkey. The AKP, under Erdoğan, moderated its political Islamist rhetoric, adopting a more pragmatic and less dogmatic approach to both domestic and foreign policy. In contrast, the Gülen movement evolved into something resembling a neo-brotherhood, deeply rooted in Turkish nationalism and strongly anchored in tradition, particularly religious tradition.<sup>361</sup> Despite the widespread belief that there was a close partnership between the AKP and the Gülenists during this period, their relationship is more accurately described as a strategic alliance aimed at achieving mutual benefits.<sup>362</sup> This alliance was marked by a shared political and strategic affinity, which allowed both groups to overlook their differences. Firstly, in a departure from their predecessors, both the AKP and the Gülenists avoided provoking the state elite by challenging secularism. Secondly, they both embraced a pro-Western agenda, advocating for Turkey's EU membership and market liberalization. Thirdly, the AKP and the Gülen Movement pooled their complementary strengths as a survival strategy in the face of a hostile secular environment. The AKP leveraged the educated human capital provided by the Gülenists in state bureaucracy, while the Gülenists capitalized on the opportunity to expand their influence across social, economic, and bureaucratic spheres. Although many other religious communities existed, the Gülenists' rapid expansion led them to dominate the term "*cemaat*" itself. At the time, there were growing claims of Gülenist infiltration, but the AKP chose to turn a blind eye.<sup>363</sup>

Yet, by 2002, when the AKP came to power, the Gülenists had already great control of the police academy in Ankara. A high-ranking guide in the Gülenist movement became the police chief of the Academy, a key development in the movement's adoption of an authoritative, law enforcement character. This, however, "went beyond the traditional roles of policing normally associated with the

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<sup>359</sup> Known as Fethullahçılar.

<sup>360</sup> Zubaida, 2004.

<sup>361</sup> Göl, A. (2016). Turkey's clash of Islamists: Erdogan vs Gülen. *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/turkey-s-clash-of-islamists-erdogan-vs-g-len/>

<sup>362</sup> Taş, 2018, 367.

<sup>363</sup> Notably, in 2005 and 2007, the AKP rejected two motions by the main opposition party, the CHP, to investigate what it termed the "F-type Organization," with "F" referring to Fethullah Gülen.

utmost aim of preserving public safety, welfare, and peace. For the Gülenists, police were encouraged to use intelligence and blackmail against Gülen's opponents."<sup>364</sup> In sum, "police work" became the main function of Gülenist networks' intelligence gathering for specific self-interests. For instance, a retired police chief, who also became the director of the police high school academy in 2006, said in an interview:

The Gülenist networks would prepare the students for the police high schools and they controlled the exam system, and this resulted in the Gülenist-dominated police force. They even had the teachers of these schools from the movement. Those who were not Gülenists in the police force realized the power of the Gülenists in the system and thus wanted to be viewed as Gülenists to protect their jobs.<sup>365</sup>

A former political strategist close to the AKP holds a similar view:

The AKP made numerous mistakes, but the biggest was having complete reliance on Gülenist intelligence. Some ministers did not manage their departments; instead, they allowed the Gülenist bureaucracy to control them, focusing solely on accumulating wealth. The Gülenists effectively operated as "a state within a state," forming what can be described as a "parallel state." They were also responsible for orchestrating and facilitating bribery. The coalition with the Gülenists eroded the party's moral credibility.<sup>366</sup>

On this point, the Gülen movement succeeded where others had failed in the past. More concretely, as research works by Hanefi Avcı and Ahmet Şık show, the Gülenists had captured key positions in the police and the judiciary.<sup>367</sup> Similar attempts of infiltration targeted the army and the National Intelligence Organization but without the same success. Still, "this state within a state has been able to see off numerous rivals and opponents."<sup>368</sup>

Within this complicated power-sharing realm, tensions eventually emerged between the AKP and the Hizmet movement. By 2010, the Gülenists became the dominant group within AKP municipal strongholds, especially in Istanbul and Ankara. Some AKP politicians openly questioned the growing power of Gülenists within the party, especially in municipalities. According to a former member,

we [the Gülenists] were also able to dictate the tenor and course of the AKP discourse in and out of the country. As the movement became the main force in Ankara in controlling the state bureaucracy, it also fully controlled the bidding process regarding the bureaucratic needs of the government.<sup>369</sup>

While both shared a vision of combining Islamic values with modernity, their methods and strategies differed. Erdoğan sought to achieve his goals through political power and democratic processes, while

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<sup>364</sup> Yavuz, 2018, 20

<sup>365</sup> Quoted in Ibid., 21.

<sup>366</sup> Interview.

<sup>367</sup> Yavuz, 2018, 20.

<sup>368</sup> Balci, B. (2023). Islam and Politics in Turkey: Alliance and Disunion Between the Fethullah Gülen Movement and the Justice and Development Party of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(3), 513.

<sup>369</sup> Interview of the author with a former Hizmet member.

Gülen preferred a more gradual infiltration of the state through education and the cultivation of a new generation of Turkish Muslims. They also held different views on ideational issues. For instance, they adopted a diverse reaction in the Mavi Marmara case.<sup>370</sup> While in Turkey, the incident ignited strong nationalist sentiment and an anti-Israel media campaign, Hizmet took a more measured stance, with Gülen himself criticizing the initiative as irresponsible and dangerous. Such a decision to distance himself from the AKP's bold initiative can be attributed, in part, to his exile in the US, where he is supported by political circles that are sympathetic to Israel. The local context, including his ties to these US political circles, indirectly influenced his opposition to Erdoğan, especially when the latter took a strong stance against Israel. This initial dissent by Gülen was not well received by Erdoğan, who at the time still considered Gülen an ally. This breach marked the beginning of a deterioration in their relationship, eventually leading to a significant rift between the two leaders and their respective factions.<sup>371</sup> Nonetheless, at the peak of Turkey's foreign policy activism, the Hizmet movement's influence extended far beyond Turkey's borders, with its network of schools and cultural institutions promoting Turkish values and increasing the country's soft power internationally. The influential *Feza Group*, owning the newspaper *Zaman* and the TV channel *Samanyolu*, combined broad support for the AKP with a liberal rather than distinctly Islamist position. The movement also had a significant impact on TFP making. The AKP was often hostile to the diplomatic corps, viewing them as better educated, pro-Western, and secular – characteristics that distanced them from Erdoğan's more Islamic-oriented base. Erdoğan would even refer to diplomats as “monsieur” to imply that they were “alien” and disconnected from his supporters.<sup>372</sup> The objective was to diminish the foreign ministry's influence, and the Gülenists assisted the AKP by turning their networks abroad into “alternative embassies”, equipped with more resources and better access to the government in Ankara. The ambassador revealed that he would often only learn of ministers' visits after the Gülenists had already prepared their programs. During formal state visits by government ministers to foreign countries, it was common for the programs to be organized by the local Gülenist networks rather than by the official Turkish embassies.<sup>373</sup> These networks would then report back to the embassies about the officials visits.<sup>374</sup> In many instances, Gülenist networks in foreign countries were more active and influential than the embassy staff themselves. This power becomes evident when looking at numbers.

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<sup>370</sup> Explored in the external level section.

<sup>371</sup> Lauria, J. (2010, June 4). Reclusive Turkish Imam Criticizes Gaza Flotilla. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704025304575284721280274694>.

<sup>372</sup> About this issue, see the individual level section on Erdoğan.

<sup>373</sup> When Abdullah Gül was a Foreign Minister, he sent regulation to all embassies on 16 April 2003 and called upon embassies to work closely with the Gülenists and visit their schools and provide necessary support. This regulation of the Foreign Ministry was removed on 18 May 2014. See Cumhuriyet. (2014, May 18). *Cemaat genelgesine iptal*. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/cemaat-genelgesine-iptal-73301>

<sup>374</sup> Interview with former Turkish Ambassador and with an advisor for Turkey's African policies.

According to one count, at its peak, there were around 300 affiliated schools in Turkey, and over 1,000 of them in as many as 160 countries across the globe, including 120 charter schools in the United States.<sup>375</sup> By 2008, *The Economist* would proclaim that the GM was “vying to be recognized as the world’s leading Muslim network.”<sup>376</sup> In general, the Gülenists played a critical role in pushing the military back into the barracks by orchestrating fabricated court cases and strategically placing their strongest sympathizers in key bureaucratic positions to gain control over state institutions. The power struggle between the Kemalists and the AKP reached a critical point during the 2010 constitutional referendum, which granted the government the authority to restructure state institutions, particularly the Constitutional Court. This marked a turning point, and by the time of the 2011 national elections, the Kemalist bureaucracy had been effectively subordinated, allowing the Gülenists to emerge as the dominant force within the state apparatus rather than the AKP. As Yavuz aptly summarizes,

the goal of the Gülen movement – embedded in a religious segmented society in Turkey’s western and central Anatolian regions – was to empower Turkey’s marginalized conservative Muslim population through education, media outlets to bring their voices into the public sphere, and support to strengthen the economic infrastructure in the regions. However, as the movement expanded to work closely with local and national “governments, it underwent a transformation that saw it move far from its original humanistic intentions. By allying itself with the AK Party, the Gülen movement became a religio-political entity with its target moving to control the state. Thus, it seized the socio-political debate in highly segmented society but also consolidated its organizational forms within the corridors of the state bureaucracy.<sup>377</sup>

With their grip on the state bureaucracy firmly established, the Gülenists began to assert their influence in the political arena, pressuring the AKP to allocate over 100 elected positions to followers of the Gülen movement. However, the Gülenists in Ankara sought even more power than their actual representation warranted. This growing influence did not sit well with Erdoğan and his close circle of advisers, who were increasingly uncomfortable with the unchecked expansion of Gülenist power within the bureaucracy. They were particularly concerned about the potential consequences of the Gülenists’ cooperation with the United States, Israel, and European powers, which posed a significant threat to the AKP’s control. All of this would become a major source of contention in the following years.

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<sup>375</sup> Watmough, S. P., & Öztürk, A. E. (2018). The Future of the Gülen Movement in Transnational Political Exile: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 19(1), 5.

<sup>376</sup> *The Economist*. (2008, March 6). *How Far They Have Travelled*.

<sup>377</sup> Yavuz, 2018, 23.

### 6.2.3.2. *Changing Power Dynamics: the AKP, the MFA, and Other Institutions*

These dynamics also prompted a departure from the established norms of TFP, as the AKP government increasingly sought to centralize decision-making and assert greater control over traditional bureaucratic institutions. Scholars have examined this shift from various perspectives, noting how a “changing elite power structure may remove traditional restraints on foreign policy”<sup>378</sup> and how “increasing heterogeneity in the elites resulted in an incremental shift in the Turkish foreign policymaking process.”<sup>379</sup> Historically, the MFA played a central role in this process, operating within a hierarchical and consensus-driven framework that sought to balance the interests of various bureaucratic entities.<sup>380</sup> As noted, the Turkish foreign policy bureaucracy “constructed its ideals on predictability by emphasizing the country’s alliance with the United States and European institutions and sustaining the stability in its surrounding region.”<sup>381</sup> The MFA, along with other key agencies such as the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and the Office of the Chief of General Staff (OGS), formed the backbone of the foreign policy bureaucracy, with each agency having its own internal decision-making processes before presenting policy suggestions to the PMO.<sup>382</sup> The close ideological alignment between the MFA and OGS often led to a unified approach in foreign policy, particularly during the Cold War and early post-Cold War periods. However, the rise of the AKP brought about significant structural changes in the Turkish bureaucracy in the realm of foreign policy. The AKP government, driven by its reformist agenda, sought to bypass traditional bureaucratic structures that were perceived as impediments to its political objectives. This “anti-establishment” feature of AKP’s policy embodied the growing divergence between elected officials and the traditional, appointed bureaucratic elite.<sup>383</sup> Indeed, the “government made foreign policy decisions by consulting only with select bureaucrats in agencies aligned with their vision”<sup>384</sup>. This was the case of TİKA, which evolved from being a small department under the PMO to being granted greater authority than other agencies within the foreign policy bureaucracy, and then<sup>385</sup> transformed into a Global Development Agency

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<sup>378</sup> Aydınli, E., & Erpul, O. (2021). Elite Change and the Inception, Duration, and Demise of the Turkish–Israeli Alliance. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(2), 2.

<sup>379</sup> Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, R. (2021). The Sociology of Diplomats and Foreign Policy Sector: The Role of Cliques on the Policy-Making Process. *Political Studies Review*, 19(4), 569.

<sup>380</sup> Tayfur, F., & Göymen, K. (2002). Decision Making in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Caspian Oil Pipeline Issue. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38(2), 101–122.

<sup>381</sup> Aydınli, & Erpul, 2021, 2.

<sup>382</sup> Hale, 2012.

<sup>383</sup> Aslan, S. (2021). Public Tears: Populism and the Politics of Emotion in AKP’s Turkey. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 53(1), 1–17.

<sup>384</sup> Interview with a former Turkish diplomat.

<sup>385</sup> Its budget increased nearly five-fold between 2003 and 2013, reflecting the government’s strategy to decouple the MFA from the decision-making processes and to centralize control within the executive branch. Akıllı, E., & Çelenk, B. (2019). TİKA’s Soft Power: Nation Branding in Turkish Foreign Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 21(3), 135–151.

(GDA) with broad autonomy from the MFA.<sup>386</sup> As such, “[TIKA] was that powerful that even senior ambassadors could not give too many orders to [its] agents.”<sup>387</sup> Moreover, the agency’s economic autonomy allowed it to operate independently, and it did not seek the MFA’s permission for its projects. An interviewee highlighted the limited authority of the MFA over TIKA, stating, “The ambassador might help the local TIKA office to pass the project proposal coming from local channels. Essentially, the ambassador is only invited to the opening ceremony of the project, rather than having a role in deciding which project TIKA would work on.”<sup>388</sup> This shift highlighted the increasing divergence between the government’s foreign policy agenda and the traditional bureaucratic structures. In addition, the AKP government sought to assert greater control over other key agencies involved in foreign policymaking, such as the Secretariat General for EU Affairs (*Avrupa Birliği Bakanlığı*, ABG). Initially, ABG operated under the MFA, but under the AKP, it was transformed into a ministry directly under the control of elected officials, effectively removing the MFA from its dominant role in EU-related decision-making. Following the recognition of Turkey’s EU candidacy status in December 1999, ABG was established to oversee the accession negotiations and sustain communication between state agencies working on various negotiation chapters.<sup>389</sup> However, under the AKP, ABG became a key player in Turkey’s EU negotiations, with its management team composed of career diplomats. This led to a rivalry between ABG and the MFA, as ABG began to offer better career opportunities to diplomats and played a more central role in shaping Turkey’s European policy. For Sever, the government’s decision to transform ABG into a ministry in 2011 and to replace Turkey’s head negotiator with AKP-affiliated bureaucrats marked the end of ABG’s authority over the Europeanization momentum.<sup>390</sup> The rivalry between the MFA and ABG, which had been brewing since the early 2000s, was emblematic of the broader tensions within the foreign policy bureaucracy as the AKP sought to assert its authority over traditional institutions.<sup>391</sup> The tension between the MFA and the AKP government became increasingly evident as the government asserted greater control over foreign policy. The shift in power was marked by “the increasing role of the Prime Minister in decision-making processes, with the PMO increasingly sidelining the MFA and other established agencies.”<sup>392</sup> Constitutionally, the Prime Minister, as the head of government,

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<sup>386</sup> Idem, 143.

<sup>387</sup> Interview with a relevant figure in Turkey’s governmental humanitarian sector.

<sup>388</sup> Interview. Also similar a quote in Sevin, E. (2017). *Public Diplomacy and the Implementation of Foreign Policy in the US, Sweden and Turkey*. Springer International Publishing.

<sup>389</sup> Hatipoğlu, O. G. (2018). Farklı Bir Kamu Kurumu Olarak Tika: Örgüt Yapısının Dönüşümü Hakkında Bir Analiz. *Türkiye Siyaset Bilimi Dergisi*, 1(1), 99–116.

<sup>390</sup> Idem.

<sup>391</sup> For a former Ambassador’s reflection on the organizational structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1923 to 2018, see Özcoşkun, A. R. (2018). *Cumhuriyetin kuruluşundan bugüne Dışişleri Bakanlığı teşkilat yapısı (1920-2018)* (Dışişleri Bakanlığı Matbaası). T.C.. DIŞİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞI. Diplomatik Arşiv.

<sup>392</sup> Interview with former Turkish diplomat.

was the ultimate decision-maker in foreign policy matters. However, under the AKP, the role of the Prime Minister in foreign policy decision-making became even more pronounced, with the PMO often overriding the MFA's recommendations, particularly on sensitive issues like the Kurdish questions and anti-Israel rhetoric.<sup>393</sup> The growing influence of the AKP over the foreign policy bureaucracy was not without resistance. The public protest of many retired ambassadors and consuls-generals against then-Prime Minister Erdoğan's derogatory remarks about diplomats highlighted the deepening rift between the government.<sup>394</sup> These officials criticized the increasing role of political appointees in foreign policy decision-making and lamented the erosion of the MFA's authority. One former MFA undersecretary pointed out that "OGS trusted the MFA, rather than trusting politicians, [...] whom the MFA also did not trust."<sup>395</sup> The AKP government's approach to foreign policy during this period was also characterized by

a deliberate effort to marginalize traditional bureaucratic institutions and elevate new power centers that were more aligned with its political vision. The government's efforts to centralize decision-making, redistribute resources, and appoint non-career diplomats were part of a broader strategy to assert its authority over the foreign policy bureaucracy and to pursue its revisionist agenda.<sup>396</sup>

As a result, during this period, TFP became "more centralized, politically driven, and less reliant on the expertise and institutional knowledge of the established bureaucracy."<sup>397</sup> Therefore, it was in this phase that the AKP set the basis for "further strengthening its hold on power and altering Turkey's institutional mechanisms."<sup>398</sup>

As evidenced above, the AKP's strategy vis-à-vis domestic opposition, which transitioned from accommodation to insulation, was strong enough to allow the new political elites to initiate a new set of foreign policy agendas. As a result, TFP started becoming more active in regional issues. In tandem with this policy, the new National Security Policy Document (*Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi*), commonly referred to as the "Red Book," no longer identified Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Greece as existential security threats.<sup>399</sup> Through new foreign policy principles and a more daring attitude, Turkey grew economically through trading and investing in the Arab world.<sup>400</sup> As seen earlier, the AKP's foreign policy agenda aimed to strengthen Turkey's ties to all regions, particularly with

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<sup>393</sup> Özkan, B. (2015). Information and Communication Technologies and Organizational Culture in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Perceptions*, 20(4).

<sup>394</sup> Akkoyunlu, 2021, 250.

<sup>395</sup> Gülen, B. (2022). Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy: Rivalry between the Government and the Bureaucracy in Turkish Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 18(4), 11.

<sup>396</sup> Interview with former Turkish Ambassador and MP. On the issue, see also Özcan, M., & Usul, A. R. (2011). Understanding the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Changes within Continuity, Is Turkey Departing from the West? *USAK Yearbook*, 4, 159–185.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Interview with former bureaucrat in Ankara.

<sup>399</sup> Kösebalaban, H. (2011). *Turkish foreign policy: Islam, nationalism, and globalization* (1st ed). Palgrave Macmillan, 352.

<sup>400</sup> Davutoğlu, 2014; Sözen, 2010.

countries in the Middle East. The government further reinforced its power over the military after receiving half of the votes in the general election on June 12, 2011.<sup>401</sup> A couple of weeks later, on July 29th, the military chief of staff resigned, and the heads of the army, navy, and air force requested early retirement from their duties. After eliminating the military, long considered the guardian of the secular Republic in government decision-making mechanisms, the AKP was able to implement its policies without any domestic constraints. As the party elites successfully insulated domestic opposition, Turkey underwent a significant shift from a status quo-oriented approach to a more revisionist and proactive foreign policy, particularly toward the Middle East.<sup>402</sup> This transition was facilitated by the AKP's growing autonomy in domestic and foreign policy spheres, which allowed for firmer moves towards an integrated Middle Eastern order.<sup>403</sup> The change was also driven by profound shifts within the foreign policy executive (FPE). During the AKP's first mandate, leading figures began recruiting advisers specifically for foreign affairs, moving away from the previously bureaucratized and militarized decision-making process dominated by military officials.<sup>404</sup> This period coincided with a general de-securitization of both foreign and domestic policy, largely due to reforms implemented within the framework of the EU accession process. The decline in military influence in politics allowed the civilian government to adopt a less securitized and more autonomous approach to foreign policy.<sup>405</sup> Although the Arab uprisings and the Syrian conflict later exposed the limitations of the "zero problems with neighbors" policy, it nonetheless represented a significant departure from traditional Turkish foreign policy.<sup>406</sup> As such, the rise of the AKP marked a shift in Turkey's regional agenda, with the first two AKP governments adopting a more confident approach, pursuing leadership ambitions in the Middle East.<sup>407</sup> This process of reformulating the country's identity and international role was also underpinned by a growing neo-Ottoman rhetoric. As constructivist theory suggests, identity building is supported by narratives that ensure continuity and that make changes appear natural.<sup>408</sup> For Turkish FPEs, neo-Ottomanism served as a supra-state

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<sup>401</sup> The AKP has strengthened its domestic position and increased its votes during the first three general elections: 34.28% in 2002, 46.6% in 2007 and 49.8% in 2011. See Çarkoğlu, A. (2011). Turkey's 2011 General Elections: Towards a Dominant Party System? *Insight Turkey*, 13(3), 43–62.

<sup>402</sup> Donelli, 2020.

<sup>403</sup> Yorulmazlar & Turhan, 2015.

<sup>404</sup> Uzgel, 2003.

<sup>405</sup> İşıksal & Göksel, 2016. The early cooperation with the EU, particularly its positive reception among Western observers, led to the idea of the Turkish model" as a blend of secular institutions, moderate Islam, democracy, and globalization. However, relations with the EU began to cool after 2008 as the government's approach to the EU membership process gradually shifted. Additionally, domestic transformations, including opening space for a political solution to the Kurdish issue, created favorable conditions for a change in regional policy.

<sup>406</sup> Chiriatti, D. A., & Donelli, F. (2015). Turkish 'Zero Problems' between Failure and Success. *Centre for Policy and Research on Turkey (ResearchTurkey)*, 4(3), 08–131.

<sup>407</sup> Özkeçeci-Taner, B. (2017). Disintegration of the "strategic depth" doctrine and Turkey's troubles in the Middle East. *Contemporary Islam*, 11(2), 201–214.

<sup>408</sup> See chapter 2.



identity that was useful both for countering autonomy claims within its borders – such as the Kurdish issue – and for strengthening trans-state relations by invoking historical and cultural ties with the Middle East and the Balkans.<sup>409</sup> From the perspective of the nexus between international and domestic politics, this period reflected a dualist approach. There were strong incentives both domestically and internationally to adopt a more active and less securitized foreign policy. The rise of the AKP led to harsh criticism of the traditional “status quo” agenda, which was replaced by a new mix of softer security issues and a more proactive foreign policy behavior. This shift was driven by the perception of a permissive strategic environment, which encouraged Turkey to adopt a revisionist orientation toward the regional order.<sup>410</sup> In light of these considerations, one cannot overlook how these structural changes were heavily linked to changes in the agential (individual) parameters of the time. Therefore, the following section examines the profile and ideas of Ahmet Davutoğlu, an influential personality of the time.<sup>411</sup>

### 6.3. The Individual Level

The theoretical and methodological sections of this work have abundantly explained the importance of lowering the level of analysis to the individual level. However, while one chapter might cover more than one actor, others (like this one) are more concentrated on a single figure. While such a heterogeneous selection is certainly biased in terms of selectivity operated by the researcher, it still maintains its own rationality. To put it simply, one or more figures are selected according to the time they spent in power, the continuity of their mandate, the real influence of their party affiliation, and their own impact on foreign policy-making. In addition, and above all, a major parameter is also the capacity of these figures to elaborate and put into practice a specific doctrine or vision with far-reaching consequences. This explains why, for instance, this section does not take into consideration prominent figures like Erdoğan or Gül, but explores the personality, ideas, and operational codes of Ahmet Davutoğlu.

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<sup>409</sup> Yavuz, 2016.

<sup>410</sup> Haugom, 2019, 10.

<sup>411</sup> This choice is made for two reasons: Aware of the limitations behind excluding other figures – such as Erdoğan and Gül – from this period. First, the figures, profile, and ideas of Erdoğan will be examined in the next chapter to provide a homogeneous and less time-constrained assessment of his long and successful political trajectory. Second, the profile of figures such as Abdullah Gül is not scrutinized here because, for the period under consideration in this chapter, the main agency in terms of foreign policy change is given to the party (the AKP) instead of to the singular political personalities of the time.

### 6.3.1. New Foreign Policy Paradigms: Ahmet Davutoğlu

On the historic march of our holy nation, the AK Party signals the birth of a global power and the mission for a new world order. This is the centenary of our exit from the Middle East...whatever we lost between 1911 and 1923, whatever lands we withdrew from, from 2011 to 2023 we shall once again meet our brothers in those lands. This is a bounded historic mission.<sup>412</sup>

To understand the emergence of these new interpretive lenses aimed at reevaluating the past and the roots of the Republic of Turkey, it is crucial to analyze the doctrine and ideas developed by Ahmet Davutoğlu, “one of the most influential personalities in Turkish polity.”<sup>413</sup> A Professor of International Relations in Turkey and abroad, Davutoğlu is a rare example of an academic whose theories found concreteness in a country’s policy-making. Rising to prominence as an adviser to Erdoğan in 2002 and then as Foreign Minister since 2009, his career reached its peak with the post of Prime Minister in August 2014. Although removed from office in May 2016 due to differences with the President, the influence of his thinking continues to reverberate today. One critic saw Davutoğlu as “always the hero of his own narratives,” but if nothing else, he acquired a higher profile on the international stage than any of his recent predecessors, with “his neat mustache normally framing a bemused smile and seemingly indefatigable diplomatic activism that earned him the soubriquet of ‘Energizer Bunny’ from State Department officials.”<sup>414</sup> What first brought him closer to the AKP's circles and ideas were some key concepts expressed in an article he wrote in 1998<sup>415</sup>, where, alongside his proposal for a dialogue between civilizations that could counterbalance US hegemony, the prominent position he gave to the Islamic world in the international chessboard was noteworthy. This emphasis was often mistakenly confused with an idea of pan-Islamism aimed at exhuming concepts such as the *umma* in a purely religious sense. In contrast, more neutral terms such as “Islamic civilization” were elevated to their meaning as geopolitical structures capable of creating a sense of “imagined community” capable of overcoming tensions between nation-states. Although the AKP had distinctly Islamist origins, Davutoglu rejected the classic Islamist worldview of inevitable and perpetual warfare between Muslims and “infidels.” Instead, he argued that the Muslim world did not have the resources to develop a global strategy as an anti-systemic force. He maintained that ‘the

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<sup>412</sup> Quoted in Bekdil, B. (2014). Erdoğan’s Book of Defeat. *Middle East Forum*.

<sup>413</sup> Çakır, R. (2004, January 4). Turkey expects to obtain an important trump card relating to Cyprus after the talks between Erdoğan and President Bush. *Vatan*.

<sup>414</sup> Traub, J. (2011, January 20). Letter: Turkey’s Rules. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/magazine/06Letters-t-TURKEYSRULES-LETTERS.html>.

<sup>415</sup> Davutoğlu, A. (1997). The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis)Order. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 2(4).

history of civilizations is not composed only of clashes' and that a comprehensive civilizational dialogue...is needed for a globally legitimate international order.<sup>416</sup>

However, the most innovative and renowned elements of Davutoğlu's vision emerged with the publication of his substantial volume "Strategic Depth. Turkey's International Position" (*Stratejik Derinlik. Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*) in 2001.<sup>417</sup> Central theme was the urgent need for geopolitical repositioning revolving around the eponymous concept of strategic depth that sought to reassert Turkey's influence in its neighboring regions by recalibrating its historical and geographical identity. The core thesis, built on a hybrid approach between realism, constructivism, and liberalism, was based on the idea that the cultural-historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire had endowed Turkey with a dual depth. On the one hand, a historical depth that, in the wake of this direct legacy, continued to place the country at the epicenter of historical events, effectively decreeing a continuum of ethnic-cultural heterogeneity even after the founding of the modern Turkish nation-state.<sup>418</sup> According to Davutoğlu, Turkey's historical legacy as the successor to the Ottoman Empire and its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East endowed it with a special responsibility and capacity to influence regional and global events. Historical depth referred to the rich and complex legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which Davutoğlu saw as a source of identity and legitimacy for modern Turkey. He argued that the Ottoman Empire's historical experience provided Turkey with a unique perspective and a set of responsibilities that extended beyond its contemporary borders. The Ottoman Empire, which once governed a vast and diverse expanse across three continents, served as a model of governance characterized by multiculturalism, religious tolerance, and effective administration. Davutoğlu believed that this legacy should inform Turkey's modern-day foreign policy, enabling it to play a leadership role in regions that were once under Ottoman control, such as the Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa<sup>419</sup>. He stated, "It is now high time to close a hundred-year-old parenthesis," signaling his intention to build on Turkey's imperial identity to achieve international prestige and great power status similar to that of the former empire.<sup>420</sup>

On the other hand, geographical depth, emphasized Turkey's unique positioning at the nexus of several critical geopolitical regions, including the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Davutoğlu argued that Turkey's geographical centrality endowed it the

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<sup>416</sup> Idem.

<sup>417</sup> Davutoğlu, 2014 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).

<sup>418</sup> From Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2012). *Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu published in AUC Cairo Review (Egypt)*. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr\\_-ahmet-davutoglu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-egypt-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-egypt-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa).

<sup>419</sup> Murinson, A. (2006). The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(6), 945–964.

<sup>420</sup> Cornell, S. E. (2014). Davutoğlu and the "New Turkey": The Closing of a "Hundred Year Old Parenthesis." *Bipartisan Policy Center*. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/davutoglu-and-new-turkey/>.

potential to act as a stabilizing force in these regions. He posited that such a strategic location placed it “right at the center of many geopolitical influences” and that this centrality should enable Turkey to take on a more active and constructive role in providing security and stability, not only for itself but also for its neighboring regions.<sup>421</sup> According to him, this perspective marked a departure from the traditional Kemalist view, which saw Turkey as a peripheral nation, vulnerable to external threats and reliant on alliances with Western powers for security. In opposition, Davutoğlu advocated for a more autonomous and multidimensional foreign policy, one that would allow Turkey to project power and influence throughout its surrounding regions and beyond. He emphasized that Turkey’s role should evolve from being a peripheral country to becoming a provider of security and stability, not only within its borders but also in the broader region.<sup>422</sup> This was reinforced by many Erdoğan’s statements, such that “Istanbul is not only a center combining continents but also a central symbol combining and synthesizing the civilizations.”<sup>423</sup>

In this context, he emphasized that Turkey should not be perceived merely as a “bridge” between the East and West – a passive role that implied limited agency – but rather as a “central country” with the ability to shape outcomes across multiple regions.<sup>424</sup> This reimagining of Turkey’s role in international affairs was further reinforced by the introduction of terms like “Afro-Eurasia,” which extended the concept of Eurasia to include Africa, thereby expanding Turkey’s perceived sphere of influence<sup>425</sup>, from a “static and single-parameter policy” and becoming a “problem solver” contributing to “global and regional peace.”<sup>426</sup> In Davutoğlu’s own words,

Turkey had been sentenced to a security-dominated life by some circles on the pretext of the terror waves, especially between 1991 and 2002. When we came to power in 2002, we decided to make freedom-based democracy dominant, and this decision automatically brought us to the level of zero problems with our neighbors.<sup>427</sup>

Central to Davutoğlu’s doctrine were five guiding principles that shaped Turkish foreign policy during his tenure.<sup>428</sup> These principles were designed to transform Turkey from a reactive and security-oriented state into a proactive and influential actor on the global stage. The first principle was the

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<sup>421</sup> Davutoğlu, A. (1994). *Alternative paradigms: The impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on political theory*. University Press of America, 79.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>423</sup> Aras, B., & Görener, A. Ş. (2010). National role conceptions and foreign policy orientation: The ideational bases of the Justice and Development Party’s foreign policy activism in the Middle East. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 12(1), 86.

<sup>424</sup> Yanık, 2023, 13).

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>426</sup> See also his article ‘Davutoğlu, A. (2008). *Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007*. 10, 77–96. He has expanded this by emphasizing: ‘[W]e don’t want to be on the agenda of [the] international “community as one item of crisis. We want to be in the international community to solve the crisis. Quoted in Traub, 2011.

<sup>427</sup> Quoted in Yeşiltaş, M., & Balcı, A. (2013). A Dictionary of Turkish Foreign Policy in the AK Party Era. *Center for Strategic Research (SAM)*, 7.

<sup>428</sup> For a full account, see the original article, Davutoğlu, 2008. See also the MFA official web page: “*Sıfır Sorun Politikası*”, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/yeni-donemde-sifir-sorun-politikasi.tr.mfa>.

balance between security and (*güvenlik ve özgürlük arasında dengesi*) . Davutoğlu believed that a nation's influence in its region was contingent upon its ability to maintain internal stability while also upholding democratic values. He argued that Turkey's democratic credentials were a source of soft power, enabling it to serve as a model for other countries, particularly in the Muslim world. For him, Turkey's most important soft power was its democratic model, highlighting the importance of defending national interests while pursuing a value-based foreign policy. This principle was particularly important in the context of Turkey's relations with the EU and the broader Western world, where adherence to democratic norms was seen as a prerequisite for deeper integration and cooperation. The second principle, and perhaps the most well-known aspect of Davutoğlu's foreign policy, was the "zero problems with neighbors" policy (*komşularla sıfır sorun politikası*). This approach sought to minimize conflicts with neighboring countries and promote peaceful and cooperative relations. It was based on the idea that Turkey's security and prosperity were closely linked to the stability and well-being of its neighbors. By fostering good relations with all neighboring states, Davutoğlu believed that Turkey could enhance its own security and regional influence. The third principle involved a proactive approach to developing relations with neighboring regions and beyond (*pro-aktif bir bölgesel politika*). Davutoğlu emphasized that Turkey's influence should not be confined to its immediate neighborhood but should extend to regions with which it shared historical and cultural ties, such as the Balkans, Central Asia, and Africa. This activist vision reflected his belief in Turkey's potential to be a great regional power capable of shaping its surrounding regions' political and economic orders. Davutoğlu saw this as a logical evolution of Turkey's historical role and as a necessary response to the opportunities and challenges presented by the post-Cold War international environment. The basic idea was also to stand outside the fault line of Sunni-Shiite sectarianism and to play an active role with all-inclusive policies that bring more balance between the sides.<sup>429</sup> Davutoğlu put it this way:

Turkey's success is not only the result of state policies, but also the activities of civil society, business organizations, and numerous other organizations. . . . [In this way] the state's macro strategy conforms with the micro strategies of individual people, corporations, and civil society organizations. [...] Turkish civil society organizations form an integral part of the bigger picture defined as foreign policy. All of these elements have become part of Turkey's new international vision.<sup>430</sup>

This seemed in line with Abdullah Gül's vision when he warned Arab countries in an interview with a London Arab-language daily Al-Hayat,

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<sup>429</sup> Davutoğlu, 2000, 83.

<sup>430</sup> Idem.

If we don't take the reins ... and prefer to cover up and ignore them [our problems], then others [the United States] will try to solve them their way and interfere in our affairs...And this interference will take place in the wrong way because they don't understand our sensitivities, our habits, our cultures and our social structure.<sup>431</sup>

The fourth principle was adherence to a multidimensional foreign policy (*çok boyutlu dış politika*). Davutoğlu advocated for a foreign policy that was not dependent on a single set of relationships or alliances but instead characterized by diverse engagements with different global powers. This approach was designed to ensure that Turkey's strategic interests were not overly reliant on any one power or bloc, thus allowing it to navigate the complexities of international relations more effectively. "Turkey's relations with other global actors aim to be complementary, not in competition," he emphasized, reflecting his belief that Turkey's strategic partnerships should be mutually reinforcing rather than antagonistic. For him, it was,, therefore,, possible to maintain strategic relations with NATO, bilateral relations with the US, and the path of European integration, while at the same time cultivating a policy of dialogue with Russia and synchronization with the Eurasian shore to be conceived as integral parts of each other. The fifth and final principle was what Davutoğlu referred to as rhythmic diplomacy (*ritmik diplomasi*). This concept emphasized the importance of sustained and proactive diplomatic engagement, with Turkey playing an active role in international organizations and regional forums. Under Davutoğlu's guidance, Turkey significantly increased its participation in global governance, actively mediating conflicts in its region, and positioning itself as a key player in addressing global challenges. Rhythmic diplomacy also involved building Turkey's soft power through cultural and educational exchanges, humanitarian aid, and development assistance, particularly in regions where Turkey sought to expand its influence. Davutoğlu's notion of "rhythmic diplomacy" also highlighted Turkey's efforts to harmonize state strategies with the micro-strategies of civil society, business organizations, and other non-state actors. He asserted that "the state's macro strategy is in conformity with the micro strategies of individual people, corporations, and civil society organizations,"<sup>432</sup> reflecting the AKP's broader vision of a more integrated and participatory approach to foreign policy. Integrating various societal actors into the foreign policy process was seen as a key factor in enhancing Turkey's international influence and soft power.

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<sup>431</sup> As quoted in Al-jazeera, 18 February 2004, see a collection of his discourses here: Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2008). *Sayın Abdullah Gül'ün Çeşitli Vesilelerle Yaptıkları Açıklama, Mesaj ve Makaleleri*. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/AbdullahGul\\_makaleleri.pdf](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/AbdullahGul_makaleleri.pdf).

<sup>432</sup> Davutoğlu, 2008, 22.

In addition, one element that triggered controversies and discussions in different realms was that Davutoğlu's vision was deeply influenced by a reinterpretation of Turkey's Ottoman past. Despite Davutoğlu's efforts to distance his policies from the label of neo-Ottomanism, arguing that his approach was grounded in a realistic assessment of Turkey's geopolitical role, the term has persisted in both academic and political discourse. Davutoğlu himself clarified his stance, stating, "I am not a neo-Ottoman. Actually, there is no such policy. We have a common history and cultural depth with the Balkan countries, which nobody can deny. We cannot act as if the Ottomans never existed in this region".<sup>433</sup> According to the Turkish daily *Hürriyet*, Davutoğlu claimed that "[i]n Turkish foreign policy, the idea or goal of neo-Ottomanism cannot be found"<sup>434</sup>. In 2011, Erdoğan had made a similar argument in an article he wrote for *Newsweek*, distancing himself and the foreign policy Turkey pursued under his government from the label: "This is not a romantic neo-Ottomanism: It is realpolitik based on a new vision of the global order."<sup>435</sup> On 25 February 2005, Erdoğan made a TV speech to the nation in which he explained Turkey's new foreign policy concepts.<sup>436</sup> He also argued that "Turkey, as a country situated in the middle of Eurasia and with historical connections to the region, will establish a multidimensional diplomacy from which it will derive its power"<sup>437</sup>. This statement underscores the complexity of neo-Ottomanism as both a concept and a label that highlight the tension between historical nostalgia and strategic pragmatism in TFP under Davutoğlu. Often simplistically labeled as "neo-Ottomanism", this concept is actually complex and multifaceted, and its application in TFP under the AKP has been the subject of much debate. As many have noted "neo-Ottomanism does not have a blueprint."<sup>438</sup> While some scholars, argue that neo-Ottomanism is a defining feature of Davutoğlu's foreign policy, others caution that this label oversimplifies the complex motivations behind Turkey's diplomatic initiatives.<sup>439</sup> Yavuz describes this approach as a

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<sup>433</sup> Davutoğlu, as cited in Murinson, 2006, 961). The statement referred to Davutoğlu expressed after his remarks hailing the Ottoman era at a conference in Sarajevo: "What I am underlying is the Ottoman legacy; the Ottoman centuries in the Balkans were peace and success stories. Now we have to reinvent the underlying dynamics of that period and this is the basic foreign policy parameter for Turkey...Just like the rise of the Ottoman Balkans in the 16th century as the center of world politics, we will make these regions and Turkey the center of world politics in the future. This is the objective of Turkish foreign policy and we will achieve this. We will reintegrate the Balkans region, the Middle East and Caucasia based on the principle of regional and global peace for all humanity. See A. Davutoğlu, 'Speech at the conference the Ottoman legacy and the Balkan Muslim communities today.' Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2009). No: 187, 15 Ekim 2009, Sayın Bakanımızın Bosna-Hersek ve Arnavutluk Ziyaretleri Hk. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-187\\_-15-ekim-2009\\_-sayin-bakanimizin-bosna-hersek-ve-arnavutluk-ziyaretleri-hk\\_.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-187_-15-ekim-2009_-sayin-bakanimizin-bosna-hersek-ve-arnavutluk-ziyaretleri-hk_.tr.mfa)

<sup>434</sup> *Hürriyet*. (2010, December 28). Davutoğlu: Yeni Osmanlıcilik hedefi yok. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/davutoglu-yeni-osmanlilik-hedefi-yok-16634111>.

<sup>435</sup> *Newsweek*. (2011, January 17). Erdogan: Turkey Has Vigor the EU Needs Badly. <https://www.newsweek.com/erdogan-turkey-has-vigor-eu-needs-badly-66985>

<sup>436</sup> Athoğlu, Y. (n.d.). Davos Krizi Sonrası AKP'nin Yeni Osmanlıcilik Politikası. <https://yasinatlioglu.wordpress.com/2009/02/01/davos-krizi-sonrasi-akpnin-yeni-osmanlilik-politikasi/>

<sup>437</sup> Idem.

<sup>438</sup> Rüma, İ. (2016). Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans: Overestimated Change within Underestimated Continuity? In Ö. Z. Oktav (Ed.), *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy* (1st ed.). Routledge., 154. See also the original definition of "Stillborn neo-Ottomanism", an epithet in this title was used by another author to describe a previous period: Soysal, C. (2020). *The Stillborn Neo-Ottomanist Foreign Policy Aspiration of the Özal Era* [PhD Thesis]. Middle East Technical University.

<sup>439</sup> Yavuz, 1998, 21.

“pluralizing and populist Islamic ideology” that seeks to project Turkey as a model state within the Muslim world, blending Turkish nationalism with Sunni Islam.<sup>440</sup> For example, in the June 2011 elections, Erdoğan reflected this vision when he stated,

I greet with affection the peoples of Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Amman, Cairo, Tunis, Sarajevo, Skopje, Baku, Nicosia, and all other friends and brother peoples who are following the news out of Turkey with great excitement... Today, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans have won as much as Turkey... Sarajevo has won today just as much as Istanbul, Beirut has won as much as Izmir, and Damascus has won as much as Ankara. Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, and Jerusalem have won as much as Diyarbakır... We will become much more active in regional and global affairs... We will take on a more effective role. We will call, as we have, for rights in our region, for justice, for the rule of law, for freedom and democracy.<sup>441</sup>

This statement encapsulated the AKP’s Neo-Ottomanist narrative, which aimed to reestablish Turkey’s influence in regions that had once been part of the Ottoman Empire, using cultural and historical ties to justify contemporary geopolitical ambitions. Scholars like Behlül Özkan have argued that the label of neo-Ottomanism might not fully capture the dynamics of Davutoğlu’s foreign policy, suggesting instead that it could be characterized as “pan-Islamist” due to its focus on the Muslim world and Islamic solidarity.<sup>442</sup> For Wastnidge,<sup>443</sup> who argues that neo-Ottomanism has been used both in foreign and domestic policies, the AKP government depicts the Ottoman Empire in three different ways: as the cradle or apex of civilization, as an Islamic empire, and as a liberal, multicultural empire. Given the Islamist background of some AKP members, neo-Ottomanism is an apt strategy to support Muslims around the world. However, he also notes that neo-Ottomanism, as conceptualized during the AKP’s rule, particularly under Davutoğlu’s guidance, was not merely a revivalist or nostalgic reference to the Ottoman Empire. Rather, it was a strategic use of history and geography to craft a foreign policy that aimed to elevate Turkey’s status as a regional leader and a global power. Similarly, other critics of the neo-Ottomanist label, such as Çağaptay, admit that while the Ottoman legacy is an important rhetorical tool, the AKP’s foreign policy is more accurately described as pragmatic and driven by economic and geopolitical considerations rather than a nostalgic desire to revive the Ottoman Empire. As such the AKP’s engagement with the Middle East and other regions was motivated by a combination of economic interests, security concerns, and the desire to increase Turkey’s influence in a rapidly changing global order.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Yavuz, 1998, 21.

<sup>441</sup> New York Times. (2011, June 15). *Mandate for a New Turkish Era*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/16/world/europe/16iht-M16-TURKEY-POLICY.html>.

<sup>442</sup> Özkan, B. (2014). Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism. *Survival*, 56(4), 128.

<sup>443</sup> Wastnidge, E. (2019). Imperial Grandeur and Selective Memory: Re-assessing Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics. *Middle East Critique*, 28(1), 11.

<sup>444</sup> Çağaptay, S. (2009). Is Turkey Leaving the West? An Islamist Foreign Policy Puts Ankara at Odds With Its Former Allies. *Foreign Affairs*, 26. Other scholars, such as Danforth, have emphasized the pragmatic aspects of the AKP’s foreign policy, arguing that its



According to more supportive views, Davutoğlu had a specific vision for Turkey “as the order instituting power in its neighborhoods, a restatement of central power doctrine.”<sup>445</sup> The argument is that this was not based on an imperial vision; instead, it was a geopolitical necessity since Turkey had a responsibility and a leading role to play in establishing regional order. For Rasim Özgür Dönmez, neo-Ottomanism in foreign policy is connected to a paternalistic sense of nationhood that seeks to promote Islamic solidarity and thus create an alternative paradigm to the Western-centric world order.<sup>446</sup> Islam and the Islamic world are, therefore, a key reference point driving a civilizational conception of Turkey’s central place in world politics. As such, reflecting the neo-Ottomanist trend in Turkish intellectual life, Davutoğlu proposed a deliberate revival of the Ottoman past, “both as a matter of cultural enrichment, but also as a source of an enriched Turkish identity as a political actor’.”<sup>447</sup> According to Richard Falk, Davutoğlu emphasizes the “character” of the Ottoman Empire at its height.<sup>448</sup> From a more theoretical perspective, Yükselen argues that, in his effort to develop a theoretical framework for TFP that also serves as a strategic guide, Davutoğlu emphasized the importance of an agent’s self-perception in determining the strategic objectives.<sup>449</sup> He contends that Turkey needs to redefine its role based on its self-awareness (self-cognizance), which is rooted in understanding its existence within its specific historical and geographical context. According to Davutoğlu, this self-awareness should guide the country in a way that aligns with its historical comprehension of its place in the world. In this sense, Davutoğlu saw a strong connection between an agent’s consciousness and its strategic mindset, asserting that the intersection of geographical awareness and historical continuity shapes the relationship between mentality and strategy. Even though periods of uncertainty in an agent’s consciousness could occur, Davutoğlu believed that the enduring attributes of the agent would allow it to reclaim and strengthen its strategic role when the right conditions arise. He also himself emphasized that for an agent to create its sphere of influence, it must free itself from structural constraints. Otherwise, “a mindset that sees itself merely as an influenced area cannot establish its own sphere of influence.”<sup>450</sup> Defining such a sphere was seen as essential for strategic direction, which seeks to integrate the agent’s role into formulating strategic goals.

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alignment with the Middle East was more a response to strategic realities than an ideological orientation based on Islam. Danforth, N. (2008). Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 7(3), 83-95.

<sup>445</sup> Kardaş, Ş. (2012). From zero problems to leading the change: Making sense of transformation in Turkey’s regional policy. *TEPAV*, 5.

<sup>446</sup> Dönmez, R. Ö. (2015). Nationalism in Turkey under Justice and Development Party Rule: The Logic of Masculinist Protection. *Turkish Studies*, 16(4), 554–571.

<sup>447</sup> Falk, R. A. (2004, October 6). Reconsidering Turkey. *Zaman*.

<sup>448</sup> Falk describes this neo-Ottomanist foreign policy as based on “the willingness to appreciate and respect civilizational and ethnic diversity, and to deal with political conflict in a spirit of compromise and reconciliation.” Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Yükselen, 2020, 198.

<sup>450</sup> Davutoğlu, 2001, 93.

Therefore, these new concepts give this period of history a meaningful pattern in the context of TFP language and differentiate it from others. Yet, this does not imply that these concepts were necessarily born with the AKP cadres.<sup>451</sup> By the same token, “when we look at the historical continuity of Turkish foreign policy, it is possible to see attempts that had been made by various actors in different periods of the history to re-conceptualize foreign policy.”<sup>452</sup> Therefore, these concepts were not mere AKP discoveries, but they yielded both continuities within themselves and also significant discontinuity at the conceptual level. In this sense, Davutoğlu can be said to have constructed the theoretical and intellectual background of TFP in the AKP era. Still, the conceptual language emanating from this period is not completely his own production: “The language established by him has been molded by the AKP government.”<sup>453</sup> To put it another way, the concepts in question have been adopted by AKP policymakers and used frequently. In this sense, what is the “new” and “change” in TFO can be understood by looking at these conceptual transformations and discontinuities.<sup>454</sup> Building a pivotal platform for the analysis of civilizational continuities and transformations, self-perception does not explain changes in time through constructive or material factors. Instead, it relates them to “perceptions of place and time developed in harmony with one’s ontological consciousness.” According to Davutoğlu, the final factor enabling self-perception to emerge “is not an institutional and formal environment but one’s own worldview that places the problem of existence in a meaningful framework.”<sup>455</sup> Therefore, rather than pointing to a simple problem of existence, self-perception represents “an individual consciousness that does not need social recognition or the other.”<sup>456</sup>

Let aside the purely ideational side of this conceptualization, during the AKP era, these ideas had a direct impact on the reinterpretation of strategic elements. Incorporating civilizational foundations into strategy and foreign policy inevitably brought several implications for TFP. In particular, “adding new meanings to Turkey’s self-awareness coincided with the exploration of new objectives, but also with new means to achieve them.”<sup>457</sup> For instance, Oğuzlu highlighted the connection between the level of securitization and the nature of power, suggesting that reducing securitization could shift power from material to ideational forms, where soft power and diplomacy

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<sup>451</sup> Concepts like “historical dimension” (*tarihsel boyut*), “vision deficiency” (*vizyon yetersizliği*), “good relations with neighbours” (*komsularla iyi ilişkiler*), “cooperation among civilisations” (*medeniyetler arası işbirliği*) and “opening” (*açılım*) were used by one of the most influential names of the pre-AK Party period, namely İsmail Cem. See Yeşiltaş & Balcı, 2024, 8.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>453</sup> Idem.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>455</sup> Davutoğlu, A. (1997). *Medeniyetlerin Ben-idrâki. Divan: İlmi Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 1, 10.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>457</sup> Interview with a Turkish political advisor.

became more prominent.<sup>458</sup> In this context, the emphasis moved from material resources to the ideational aspects of power, underscoring the importance of cultural and diplomatic influence in Turkish foreign policy.

This new foreign policy course has caused a deep split within the foreign policy establishment in Turkey itself.<sup>459</sup> The recognition of the validity of this new approach by the military establishment emboldened the current Turkish leadership to deviate from blindly following the American line. This growing gap between the positions of the United States and Turkey in the Middle East drew criticism from some American analysts associated with the Bush administration. Former assistant to Deputy Secretary of Defense Michael Rubin wrote, “The damage done by Erdoğan’s positions extends far beyond hurt diplomatic feelings. His grandstanding has done lasting damage to Turkey’s security.”<sup>460</sup> Mainly because of historic, cultural and religious attachments, Turkey was imagined as a “model” and the “leader” for Middle Eastern countries by Davutoğlu.<sup>461</sup> However, although he certainly helped to give Turkish foreign policy a much higher international profile,

it can be argued that, in practice, the two approaches – securitized nationalism and de-securitized liberalism – continued in uneasy tandem and that the AKP leadership did not always stick strictly to its own declared principles. Unexpected events, like the so-called Arab Spring of actual and attempted political liberalization in the Middle East in 2011, faced it with questions that Davutoğlu’s grand vision had not always foreseen. This reflected the internal balance of power between the AKP government and the state establishment and the hard external realities.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Oğuzlu, 2007.

<sup>459</sup> “You can see a split between the people who run the foreign ministry and the people who run foreign policy for the AKP, and that’s really a struggle for the future course of Turkish foreign policy”, said an Ankara-based western diplomat, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue.” Quoted in Murison, 2006, 964.

<sup>460</sup> Quoted in Rubin, M. (2004, August 10). Shifting Sides? The problems of neo-Ottomanism. *National Review Online*. <https://www.michaelrubin.org/918/shifting-sides>.

<sup>461</sup> Bekdil, 2014.

<sup>462</sup> Hale, 2012, 138.

## 7. THE ERA OF THE SO-CALLED “STRATEGIC AUTONOMY”

The precedent chapter has revealed how the combination of a permissive external environment and a domestic power concentration in the hands of the AKP favored the implementation of a proactive foreign policy based on the principles of strategic depth and zero problems with neighbors. However, in the early 2010s, particularly in the wake of the Syrian civil war and the 2013 military coup in Egypt, Turkey’s self-confident regional policies were confronted by substantial security threats. The altered regional context, characterized by internal conflicts, failed states, and significant humanitarian crises, necessitated a redefinition of priorities by Turkey’s foreign policy elites against the widespread turbulence affecting the entire region. The eruption of democratic movements in Tunisia heightened a sense of vulnerability across all regional states, which perceived themselves as exposed to similar unrest. Concurrently, the strategic shift of the United States towards the Asia-Pacific region, under the “leading from behind” policy of the Obama administration, resulted in a gradual decrease in American engagement in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> This withdrawal created a vacuum that allowed other major powers, such as Russia and China, to enhance their presence and influence. This systemic shift, coupled with evolving regional dynamics, prompted Turkey – alongside other regional powers, such as Iran – to pursue a more assertive role in regional affairs. Initially, the emergence of a (at least perceived) post-Western international order and significant changes in the regional balance of power gave TFP elites a more permissive strategic environment.<sup>2</sup> However, further escalations in the forms of civil wars and hegemonic competition caused Turkey to transition from a soft to hard power-based *modus operandi* to preserve national security and pursue its strategic objectives. In addition, these reversals witnessed mutually influential dynamics with radical domestic alterations, from popular upheavals like the Gezi Park protests to institutional ones such as the move to towards a Presidential system.

Similarly, as this section and the conclusive remarks will address, more recent events like Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the War in Gaza since October 2023 appear to confirm how the post-Arab Uprising has prompted a process of change in which Turkish policymakers began to pursue the idea of Turkey’s “strategic autonomy.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Löffmann, G. (2015). Leading from Behind – American Exceptionalism and President Obama’s Post-American Vision of Hegemony. *Geopolitics*, 20(2), 308–332; Krieg, A. (2016). Externalizing the burden of war: The Obama Doctrine and US foreign policy in the Middle East. *International Affairs*, 92(1), 97–113.

<sup>2</sup> Fuat Keyman, E. (2016). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Arab Spring era: From proactive to buffer state. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(12), 2274–2287; Hazbun, W. (2018). Regional Powers and the Production of Insecurity in the Middle East. *WORKING PAPERS*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> The concept will be elaborated and investigated later.

## 7.1. The External Level<sup>4</sup>

There are two predictable and nearly always mistaken responses to any great international upheaval: one is to say that everything has changed; the other is to say that nothing has changed.<sup>5</sup>

This observation aptly reflects the complex reality of the MENA region after the unrest erupted in 2010-2011. While some scholars viewed the so-called Arab Uprisings as transformative events that could give birth to a new regional order<sup>6</sup>, others contended that, despite significant disruptions, many of the underlying dynamics of power and governance remained unchanged.<sup>7</sup> In truth, both perspectives hold merit, revealing a nuanced reality where continuity and change coexist, driven by an evolving interplay of global, regional, and state-level dynamics that has reshaped the concepts of power, alliances, and security in the Middle East. As a result of the street revolts that spread throughout the MENA and severely shook post-colonial authoritarian regimes, a season of (potential or actual) drastic changes opened up. Yet, it did not follow the direction many would have expected. Indeed, from a structural point of view, the overthrow of the previous status quo coincided neither with the fulfillment of popular demands for reform nor even with the creation of a new and defined regional order.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the unpredictability and uncertainty increased the area's instability, leading the various regional actors to redefine their national interest goals and, by extension, the framework of their alliances and rivalries. In addition, power vacuums resulting from the decay of traditional hegemonic regimes in the Middle East began to be channeled into an exasperated competition for regional influence among several rising powers, primarily Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, and Turkey. In summary, in the current Middle East (dis)order

[...] the region lies at the crossroads of multiple rivalries and conflicts. The proliferation of failed and weakened states has created new opportunities for competition and intervention, favoring new actors

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<sup>4</sup> Important remarks: the Wars in Ukraine and Gaza and the uncertainties about post-Assad Syria have erupted after this thesis was conceptualized. Therefore the author chose to create a separate dedicated section – “in lieu of a conclusion” – at the end of this chapter, where these dynamics are evaluated with a less rigid division between the three levels of analysis. Still, the necessity to explore lines of continuity and change necessarily asks to provide some anticipations, especially considering that both events are part of broader regional and international dynamics and have not entered TFP all of a sudden. However, while interviews and secondary sources could be explored also with reference to developments related to late 2023 and early 2025, the more scarce amount of primary resources compared to the previously analyzed periods led the author to dedicate more room to the post-Arab Uprising period in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Halliday, quoted in Valbjørn, M., & Bank, A. (2012). The New Arab Cold War: Rediscovering the Arab dimension of Middle East regional politics. *Review of International Studies*, 38(1), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Galay, D. (2016). Turkey's Post-Arab Spring Foreign Policy How Ankara Came to Embrace a Policy of Selective Engagement. *Foreign Affairs*. For an overview, Dehshiri, M. R., & Shahmoradi, H. (2020). Resurgence of Geopolitical Rivalry in the MENA after the 'Arab Spring.' *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 14(2), 194–215.

<sup>7</sup> The old order proved to be more resilient than expected as the hopes of a democratic Middle East faded away, the self-declared Islamic State began losing territory and the predictions of an imminent end of the “Sykes–Picot borders” revealed themselves to be a myth. Lynch, M. (2021). Taking stock of MENA political science after the uprisings. *Mediterranean Politics*, 26(5), 682–695; Del Sarto, R. A., Malmvig, H., & Lecha, E. S. I. (2019). Interregnum: The Regional Order in the Middle East and North Africa after 2011. *SSRN Electronic Journal*; Fawcett 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Demir, S., & Rijnoveanu, C. (2013). The impact of the Syria crisis on the global and regional political dynamics. *Journal of Turkish World Studies*, XIII(1), 55–77.

and new capabilities. Regional dynamics are no longer determined by formal alliances and conventional conflicts between major states. Instead, power operates through influence peddling and proxy warfare.<sup>9</sup>

Within this context, it is important to recall that the Middle East is more accurately described as a system of territorial states rather than nation-states, within which multiple levels of identity – substate, state, and supra-state – concurrently exist.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, regional states should be conceptualized as interconnected entities rather than the isolated “billiard balls” proposed by realist theory.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, driven by security imperatives and national ambitions, each state displayed its own reaction to the unfolding events begun in the early 2010s. However empirically limiting, the post-Arab Uprisings order can conventionally be seen as centered on three main strands of hegemonic competition: the clash between the pro-Iranian “Axis of Resistance” and the solid de facto alliance between the United States and Israel, the emerging rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and a new political-ideological fault line in the “Sunni world.”<sup>12</sup> It is precisely this last element, inserted as a result of the disagreements between the actors more inclined to maintain the status quo – led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE – and the more revisionist ones – such as Turkey and Qatar – that has been the real game changer, helping to reshape both intra- and extra-regional arrangements and alliances and the ways in which these have gradually taken form. Thus, there has been a general abandonment of idealistic foreign doctrines hinging on rigid long-term alliances in favor of an increasing number of transactional arrangements and so-called “marriages of interest,” based on more realist approaches marked by national interests.<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, ongoing changes at the regional level – including the rise and fall of ISIS, developments in the Syrian conflict, and the return of Russia in the face of US disengagement in the area – have reshuffled the logic of military intervention, the role of non-state actors, and the use of the ideological card. On the other hand, the coexistence between these same factors and specific alterations at the domestic level has helped reshape relations with different actors, effectively fostering the creation of “common threats” and collaborations that, in other contingencies, would have been atypical or unattainable.

However, it is important to remember that domestic and regional politics are, of course, also embedded in and shaped by the international permeation of the MENA regional system. At the core

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<sup>9</sup> Lynch, M. (2018). The New Arab Order: Power and Violence in Today's Middle East. *Foreign Affairs*, 97(5), 116.

<sup>10</sup> <sup>10</sup> Del Sarto, R. A., & Soler I Lecha, E. (2024). Regionalism and Alliances in the Middle East, 2011-2021: From a “Flash in the Pan” of Regional Cooperation to Liquid Alliances. *Geopolitics*, 1–27.

<sup>11</sup> Noble, P 2008, 'From Arab System to Middle East System? Regional Pressures and Constraints', in K Baghat & AE Dessouki (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, American University of Cairo Press, pp. 49-102.

<sup>12</sup> Yetim, M., & Telci, İ. N. (2023). Another “Third Way” to Narrate the Existing Alliances in the Middle East: Turkey-Qatar, Saudi Arabia-UAE, and Iran-Syria. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(3), 484–505.

<sup>13</sup> Del Sarto & Soler I Lecha, 2024.

of this transformation is the evolving nature of power distribution (polarity) within the global system.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned, in the early post-Cold War period, the world experienced a unipolarity phase dominated by the US, which sought to establish a liberal international order anchored in its economic, military, and ideological primacy. However, this unipolar moment began to unravel in the early 21st century. Several factors – including the overextension of American power in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 2008 global financial crisis, and the emergence of new economic powerhouses such as China and India – exposed the vulnerabilities of a US-led global order and paved the way for what many now describe as “multipolarity.”<sup>15</sup> Far from being a pure IR-based term, also historians like Posen attribute this shift to the rise of emerging powers, the globalizing economy, and a significant redistribution of relative wealth and economic power from West to East.<sup>16</sup> Yet, contrary to pure realist accounts, the idea of a multipolar world alone does not fully capture the fluidity of contemporary international dynamics. For instance, Robert Manning discusses the concept of a “nonpolar” world, where power is not concentrated in any single state or group of states but is distributed among a broad spectrum of actors – both state and non-state.<sup>17</sup> This “messy and complex” environment is marked by the erosion of traditional hierarchies and the rise of varied forms of influence that extend beyond conventional geopolitics, encompassing economic, technological, cultural, and normative domains. In such a system, smaller states, multinational corporations, transnational networks, and even influential individuals can become pivotal players, further complicating the international order.

To some extent, the MENA region, where Turkey “has more than one foot in,” vividly reflects how these global shifts in polarity directly influence regional dynamics. Theoretically, Buzan and Wæver argue that the polarity of any regional security complex – whether unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar – is determined by the number of active powers and the nature of their interactions.<sup>18</sup> In practice, in the Middle East, the decline of US hegemony and the increasing assertiveness of other global actors like Russia and China have resulted in a “fragmented multipolarity.”<sup>19</sup> This term captures the breakdown of clear power blocs and the emergence of a more fluid environment where influence is contested, and alliances constantly shift. Hazbun notes that the Middle East’s regional order is best understood as a “multipolar structure with competing state, transnational, and societal actors” rather than a traditional realist model of fixed alliances.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the Arab uprisings

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<sup>14</sup> Ehteshami, 2024; Liber, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Tocci, 2023; Lieber, 2022; Wohlforth, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Posen, B. R. (2009). Emerging Multipolarity: Why Should We Care? *Current History*, 108(721), 347–352.

<sup>17</sup> Manning, R. (2009). Nonpolar World: Or Just Messy and Complex? *Atlantic Council*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/nonpolar-world-or-just-messy-and-complex/>.

<sup>18</sup> Buzan & Wæver, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Hinnebusch, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Hazbun, 2018.

served as a catalyst that exposed and accelerated these shifts. As Gause explains, these uprisings “revealed and massively contributed to widespread state weakness in the region and intensified the perception of regime insecurity,” creating a pervasive sense of vulnerability among ruling elites.<sup>21</sup> This insecurity was further compounded by the perception of a strategic retreat of the US, whose “pivot to Asia” signaled a reduced willingness to engage in the Middle East’s conflicts.<sup>22</sup> The diminished US appetite for direct military intervention, evident in its restrained approach to the Syrian civil war and the negotiations leading to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, reinforced the impression among traditional allies like Turkey and Saudi Arabia that they could no longer rely solely on American security guarantees.<sup>23</sup> As the reliability of these guarantees waned, regional powers were compelled to seek alternative security arrangements. This search has led to the forming of “liquid alliances” – highly flexible, ad hoc coalitions that emerge and dissolve in response to shifting threat perceptions and strategic calculations.<sup>24</sup> Unlike traditional alliances based on stable, long-term interests, liquid alliances are often driven by the immediate needs of regime survival.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, this is not just a structural parameter. Rather, this preference for short-term tactical alliances over structural solutions reflects the deep historical insecurities of the region’s ruling elites. As such, the concept of liquid alliances challenges neorealist assumptions that states act as rational, unitary actors driven primarily by material interests. Instead, as Rubin argues, ideational factors – such as identity, religion, and ideology – play a crucial role in shaping both domestic and foreign policy choices in the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> Rubin introduces the “ideational security dilemma” and “ideational balancing,” concepts that highlight how perceived ideological threats can outweigh even significant shifts in the material balance of power. This is particularly evident in the “securitization of sectarian identities”<sup>27</sup>, where regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran have used the Sunni-Shia divide to frame their geopolitical competition as an existential struggle, both for domestic legitimacy and broader regional influence in what has been renamed the “new Middle East Cold War.”<sup>28</sup> In this light, one can argue that threats are not given but are constructed through discourse and

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<sup>21</sup> Gause, F. G. (2022). Identity and Ideology in Middle Eastern International Relations. In J. L. Maynard & M. L. Haas, *The Routledge Handbook of Ideology and International Relations* (1st ed., pp. 330–342).

<sup>22</sup> Hazbun, 2018

<sup>23</sup> Del Sarto & Soler I Lecha, 2024, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ryan, C. R. (2014). Regime security and shifting alliances in the Middle East. *POMEPS*.

<sup>26</sup> Del Sarto & Soler I Lecha, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>28</sup> Darwich & Fakhoury. (2016). Casting the Other as an existential threat: The securitisation of sectarianism in the international relations of the Syria crisis. *Global Discourse*, 6(4), 712–732. By portraying sectarian differences as existential threats, regimes can mobilize domestic support, delegitimize opposition, and justify interventions in neighboring states. This strategy aligns with constructivist theories in international relations, which argue that threats are not given but are constructed through discourse and representation. Constructed threats, in turn, shape state behavior and reinforce narratives that drive conflict and intervention, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of insecurity and escalation. See also Wendt, 1992; Bilgin, 2010.



representation. As such, the fluidity of liquid alliances, the securitization of identities, and the use of proxy wars all reflect the interconnectedness of global and regional dynamics. The strategic recalibration of foreign policy in response to global shifts – as the emergence of a multipolar or nonpolar order – has led to increasingly unpredictable behavior patterns among regional actors. The growing importance of non-state actors, from militias to warlords, adds another layer of complexity to the regional order. In conflicts like those in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, these actors are often supported by external powers, complicating the local dynamics and making the outcomes less predictable. Phillips argues that understanding these conflicts requires moving beyond a focus on external actors like the US to consider the interplay of local agency and structural conditions that drive conflict progression.<sup>29</sup> In such a context, some also highlight a process of “authoritarian learning,” where regimes refine tactics of repression, co-optation, and conflict management by observing and adapting strategies from other authoritarian contexts.<sup>30</sup> This form of learning has proven effective in maintaining regime stability amidst the shifting regional order, but it also perpetuates a cycle of conflict and instability, as competing powers constantly adjust their strategies to counter each other. This recalls an outside-in mechanism in which concepts like “power” and “polarity” are not sufficient to explain regional powers’ behavior. Indeed, one can encounter overlapping points across various definitions of regional power despite specific nuances among them, such as having material and soft power capabilities to assume the role of a regional leader, the willingness to adopt the role of a regional leader, the acceptance of this leading role by third parties, and the capacity to influence regional events.<sup>31</sup> This allows us to expand these distinguishing features to four main criteria: claim to leadership, power resources, employment of foreign policy instruments, and acceptance of leadership by third countries.<sup>32</sup> From these mostly similar criteria reflected in several regional power conceptualizations, Nolte’s proposes two intangible defining features, which are “the ability to have a great influence on regional affairs (power over outcomes)” via soft power reflected in foreign policy and the “recognition and acceptance of this leading position in the region or at least respect by other states inside and outside of the region (power over ideas).”<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, these trends are not confined to specific regions. Instead, a general global context of uncertain polarity has triggered a situation in which the whole liberal international order (LIO) is

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<sup>29</sup> Hazbun, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Heydemann, S. (2020). Social Pacts and the Persistence of Authoritarianism in the Middle East. In O. Schlumberger (Ed.), *Debating Arab Authoritarianism* (pp. 19–38). Stanford University Press.

<sup>31</sup> Sever, A., & Oguz Gok, G. (2016). The UN factor in the “regional power role” and the Turkish case in the 2000s. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29(3), 1150–1185.

<sup>32</sup> According to Ffemes, 2007, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Nolte, 2010, 892–893.

increasingly challenged both from within by populist movements in the West and externally by powers like Russia and China<sup>34</sup>, but also institutions like the BRICS and other international fora that seek to “build-up an alternative Southern World Order (SWO) in contrast to the Western-dominated post-World War II world order.”<sup>35</sup> This is also confirmed by the fact that emerging middle powers that traditionally supported the LIO are now turning authoritarian and contesting it.<sup>36</sup> While most studies emphasize these powers’ foreign policy practices, it is seemingly crucial to explore why they oppose the LIO and how they use both discourses and practices to do so. This is important because middle powers have historically stabilized the LIO, but their recent democratic backsliding destabilizes it, especially in areas where liberal norms are weak and illiberal great powers are gaining influence.<sup>37</sup> As Aydın-Düzgit highlights, Turkey represents the case of an emerging middle power that has increasingly contested the LIO after shifting toward authoritarianism in its domestic realm, transactionalism in its bilateral relations, and securitization and interventionism in its regional and international posture.<sup>38</sup> The antagonism between a Western and non-Western world order has been accentuated and vitalized by Russia’s war against Ukraine, which compelled countries to take sides in issues like economic sanctions, military aid, and diplomatic isolation. However, the picture seems more blurred because divergent conceptualizations of world orders are not mutually exclusive for non-Western countries. This argument rests on the observation that

many of the countries that have developed alternative institutions and refuse to follow Western policies towards Russia continue to maintain strong relations with the West. These relations include close political and economic ties with Western countries as well as dual memberships of non-Western and Western-dominated institutions that constitute the two world orders.<sup>39</sup>

For instance, Turkey remains a NATO member and “selectively engaged” in the EU while adopting confrontational policies and challenging criticism of their functionality and values.<sup>40</sup> To some extent, these challenges are grounded in justice claims, arguing for fairer representation in global governance and more equitable economic redistribution, highlighting the complexity of

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<sup>34</sup> Ikenberry, 2018; Lake, D. A., Martin, L. L., & Risse, T. (2021). Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on *International Organization*. *International Organization*, 75(2), 225–257.

<sup>35</sup> Schirm, S. A. (2023). Alternative World Orders? Russia’s Ukraine War and the Domestic Politics of the BRICS. *The International Spectator*, 58(3), 55–73. Indicatively, whereas in 2000, the BRICS countries constituted 8 % of the world’s GDP, by 2022, they comprised 26 %. France 24, “Size, Population, GDG: The BRIC nations in numbers,” 22 August 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/business/20230822size-population-gdp-the-brics-nations-innumbers>.

<sup>36</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Soyaltin-Colella & Demiryol, 2023; Aydın, U. (2021). Emerging middle powers and the liberal international order. *International Affairs*, 97(5), 1377–1394; Efstathopoulos, C. (2021). Southern middle powers and the liberal international order: The options for Brazil and South Africa. *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 76(3), 384–403.

<sup>37</sup> Aydın, 2021, 1382, 1394.

<sup>38</sup> Aydın-Düzgit, 2023; See also Aydın-Düzgit & Noutcheva, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Schirm, 2023, 56.

<sup>40</sup> On Authoritarian middle powers and the liberal order, see Aydın-Düzgit, 2023; Börzel, T. A., & Zürn, M. (2021). Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism. *International Organization*, 75(2), 282–305.

contestation in the current multipolar global order.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, however, it is arguable that this “in-between” behavior can also be “understood by analyzing the plurality of ideational attitudes and material interests in the domestic politics of countries that shape their governments’ foreign (economic) policy positions.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, it is seemingly crucial to analyze how governments tend to be responsive to societal demands and thus adopt ambivalent positions if important societal groups – economic, electoral, political – demand a continuation (or break) of close ties with the West. In the case of Turkey, the discourse and attempt to reach “strategic autonomy” stands out as a case in point.

With these considerations in mind, the following sections will address the regional and international scenarios that help identify the diachronic dimension and modality framework under which TFP has been developing and changing from 2010 until mid-2024.

### **7.1.1. TFP and The Arab Uprisings: from Zero to Many Problems with Neighbors**

At the outset of the Arab Uprising, Turkey’s leadership perceived the unrests as a positive dynamic that would make the regional environment more permissive.<sup>43</sup> This was inspired by the hope that unfolding events would further enhance Turkey’s rise as a global power by forging a new favorable regional order. As a result, Turkey increased its commitment to the many regional disputes triggered or exacerbated by the 2011 wave of instability. Besides, the AKP leadership sustained the popular demands of “change from people’s will.”<sup>44</sup> Especially Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu envisioned a “new era of civilizational awakening” that Turkey could spearhead.<sup>45</sup> Such perceptions were initially reinforced by the then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who affirmed that “Turkey ha[d] a unique opportunity in this time of great historical change [...] to demonstrate the power of an inclusive democracy and responsible regional leadership.”<sup>46</sup> Such

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<sup>41</sup> Newman, E., & Zala, B. (2018). Rising powers and order contestation: Disaggregating the normative from the representational. *Third World Quarterly*, 39(5), 871–888.

<sup>42</sup> Schirm, 2023, 56.

<sup>43</sup> Donelli, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Robins, 2013.; Işıksal & Göksel, 2018. Erdoğan declared in a speech to the Turkish Parliament that “stability can only be provided by systems that derive their legitimacy from the people,” urging regional leaders to heed the “legitimate demands” of their citizens. Taken from S Özel, S., & Özcan, G. (2011). Do New Democracies Support Democracy? Turkey’s Dilemmas. *Journal of Democracy*, 22(4), 137.

<sup>45</sup> Gürzel & Ersoy, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Friedman, D. (2015). The Turkish Model The History of a Misleading Idea. *Center for American Progress*. An article in the Economist in February 2011 promoted Turkey as a “Muslim democracy in action” that should be emulated. The Economist. (2011, February 17). *Muslim democracy in action*. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2011/02/17/a-muslim-democracy-in-action>.

endorsements reinforced Ankara's belief that it was aligned with global democratic trends, as it sought to be "on the right side of history."<sup>47</sup> As Parlar Dal maintains,

In the post-Arab Spring period, Turkish foreign policy-makers have become increasingly keen to converge their strategic interests with their Western allies to...support more Arab awakenings and push an appropriate democratic agenda for the region.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, one could also claim that "at least initially, Turkey's active support for regional democratic uprisings did not necessarily contradict its liberal orientation and strategic positioning in the Western alliance system."<sup>49</sup> In other words, some AKP officials saw the situation as a "window of opportunity"<sup>50</sup> that would have represented a key to resolving the claimed "incompatibility of Islam and democracy"<sup>51</sup> and the reshuffle of regional balances. In times when its EU path was still open, Turkey sought to play a leading role in shifting the normative framework in favor of "universal" values in the Islamic world.<sup>52</sup> However, adopting such a stance asked Ankara to discard its previous role as an "honest broker" in regional disputes in favor of active involvement in the transformations in the Arab world.<sup>53</sup> This brought Turkish FPEs in front of a kind of "ethics versus interest dilemma," which resulted in ambiguous behavior. Indeed, Turkey then began to oscillate between utilitarian/realpolitik (*reel/çıkarıcı politik*) and humanitarian/normative (*insani/normcu politik*) modes of operation.<sup>54</sup> As shown by some studies, at the outbreak of the uprisings, despite the AKP government's pushing for democracy in the region, this value-oriented approach was not followed by concrete support for the opposition movements.<sup>55</sup> Davutoğlu described the dilemma as "[w]e either

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<sup>47</sup> From the address given by Davutoğlu at the Statesmen's Forum, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, February 10, 2012, [www.csis.org/event-turkeys-foreign-policy-objectives-changing-world](http://www.csis.org/event-turkeys-foreign-policy-objectives-changing-world).

<sup>48</sup> Dal, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a Turkish high-ranked diplomat at the time.

<sup>50</sup> Doeser, F., & Eidenfalk, J. (2013). The importance of windows of opportunity for foreign policy change. *International Area Studies Review*, 16(4), 390–406.

<sup>51</sup> Abdullah Gül speech, Turkish Journal. (2012). *Cumhurbaşkanı Gül 'Harp Akademileri'nde: "Türkiye 'Erdemli Güç' Olarak Hareket Etmeli*. <http://www.turkishjournal.com/2012/04/06/cumhurbaskani-gul-harp-akademilerinde-turkiye-erdemli-guc-olarak-hareketetmeli/>

<sup>52</sup> Yorulmazlar, E., & Turhan, E. (2015). Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Arab Spring: Between Western Orientation and Regional Disorder. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 17(3), 337–352.

<sup>53</sup> Bağcı, H., & Kurç, Ç. (2016). Can Turkey become an honest mediator. *International Reports*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Tür, Ö., & Kumral, M. A. (2016). Paradoxes in Turkey's Syria policy: Analyzing the critical episode of agenda building. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 55, 109. After the downing of a Syrian military helicopter by the Turkish Air Force on September 16, 2013, Ankara portrayed its mode of operation according to normative lines. Deputy chairperson of the AKP parliamentary group Mahir Ünal framed their political reasoning as "value politic" (*değer-politik*) rather than as "realpolitik" (*reel-politik*); see TRTHaber. (2013, September 16). *Helikopterin Düşürülmesi Şaşırtıcı Değil: AK Parti Grup Başkanvekili Mahir Ünal Gündeme İlişkin Soruları Cevapladı*. <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/helikopterin-dusurulmesi-surpriz-degil-101078.html>. See also Davutoğlu, A. (2013). Zero Problems in a New Era: Realpolitik is No Answer to the Challenges Posed by the Arab Spring. *Foreign Policy*. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/21/zeroproblems-in-a-new-era/>.

<sup>55</sup> This was also due to the differences between each Arab state's interpretation of the Turkish Model. As Dalacoura there is no consensus on what the 'AKP model' is, but it usually refers to a movement which derives legitimacy through popular majoritarian democratic means; chooses gradual Islamization rather than revolutionary action; is socially conservative; and favours the free market in its economic orientation. This 'ideal-type' definition does not describe the reality of authoritarianism and personalized rule that has characterized AKP politics, particularly in recent years. (Dalacoura, 2021, p. 1130) (pdf) See, Monica Marks, 'Tunisia's Islamists and the "Turkish model"', *Journal of Democracy* 28: 1, 2017, pp. 102–115; Muhammad Muddassir Quamar, 'AKP, the Arab Spring and the unravelling of the Turkey "model"', *Strategic Analysis* 42: 4, 2018, pp. 364–76."

could maintain ties to these oppressive rulers, or we could support the popular uprisings to secure basic democratic rights.<sup>56</sup>

This became particularly evident with Turkey's support for the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria, where Turkey also supported some other Islamist groups.<sup>57</sup> In Tunisia, where the Islamist Ennahda Party came to power following the fall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Turkey welcomed Ennahda's rise as a validation of its model of moderate Islam and democracy. Similarly, in Egypt, Turkey saw the uprisings as an opportunity to reshape the regional order. Erdoğan's government was the first NATO member to call for President Hosni Mubarak to step down, framing his resignation as necessary for Egypt to avoid "dark scenarios" and to meet the demands of its people.<sup>58</sup> When Mohamed Morsi, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected as Egypt's President in 2012, Turkey further solidified its support by providing a \$2 billion loan.<sup>59</sup> "This move was more than financial support; it was a political statement that underscored Turkey's backing of Islamist-led democratic governance."<sup>60</sup> This ambiguous attitude between a valued-based and an interested-oriented approach<sup>61</sup> was evident in Turkey's stance on Libya. Here, Turkey's position was initially more cautious due to the potential risks of a NATO-led military intervention. In the following stage, Turkey announced a roadmap for Libya that included an immediate ceasefire and the beginning of a new political order pioneered by Turkey<sup>62</sup>. However, Turkey's normative-oriented involvement faced severe limitations due to the growing instability in Libya, which eventually led to the overthrow of Gaddafi. Despite its hesitations, Turkey eventually joined the NATO-led intervention<sup>63</sup> under the condition that it be conducted under NATO auspices, which would have allowed Turkey to gain a more significant say in the operation and future political developments in Libya.<sup>64</sup> Yet Turkey was

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<sup>56</sup> "Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Zero Problems in a New Era: Realpolitik Is No Answer," Foreign Policy, 21 March 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Futak-Campbell, B., & De Sauvage Nolting, H. (2022). Turkey as Normative Power: Connections with the Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab Spring. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 19(74), 3–19.

<sup>58</sup> "Turkey is side by side with the peoples of Tunisia and Egypt at this critical time... The Middle East has become a region associated with wars, conflicts, blood, tears, poverty, corruption, ignorance and abuse of human rights. We as Turkey believe that the Middle East and Arab peoples do not deserve this." SETA. (2011, February 1). *Erdogan to Mubarak: "Listen to the Egyptians."* <https://www.setav.org/en/opinion/erdogan-to-mubarak-listen-to-the-egyptians>.

<sup>59</sup> Yegin, M. (2016). Turkey's reaction to the coup in Egypt in comparison with the US and Israel. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18(4), 407–421.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with former journalist following the events.

<sup>61</sup> See for example, Aras, B., & Akarçeşme, S. (2012). Turkey and the Arab Spring. *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 67(1), 39–51; Öniş, Z. (2012). Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

<sup>62</sup> Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2011). Address by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey on the Occasion of the Opening of the Fourth Meeting of the Libya Contact Group, 15 July 2011, Istanbul. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davutoglu-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-on-the-occasion-of-the-opening-of-the-fourth-meeting-of-en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-on-the-occasion-of-the-opening-of-the-fourth-meeting-of-en.mfa).

<sup>63</sup> The Obama administration, intent on downscaling American involvement in the Middle East, was in two minds about the merits of intervening in Libya. In consequence, the US let Britain, France and its Arab allies such as Qatar, Jordan and the UAE do the fighting. In a widely read 2016 interview for The Atlantic magazine, Obama furthermore characterized the war as "the worst mistake" of his Presidency. The former President lamented the absence of a plan for the post-Gaddafi era, repeating errors from Iraq. See Goldberg, J. (2016). The Obama Doctrine. *The Atlantic*.

<sup>64</sup> Birand, M. A. (2011, March 25). Türkiye Orta Doğu'nun "Batılı ülkesi" olduğunu gösterdi... *Milliyet*. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/mehmet-ali-birand/turkiye-orta-dogunun-batili-ulkesi-oldugunu-gosterdi-1368673>.

not at the forefront of the campaign. Erdoğan offered Gaddafi asylum in June 2011, and only after the latter rebuffed the offer did Ankara recognize the NTC as Libya's legitimate representative. In this regard, Turkish vacillation was "anything but exceptional."<sup>65</sup> Indeed, this strategic alignment reflected Ankara's desire to shape post-Gaddafi Libya.

However, the optimism that initially guided Turkey's response to the Arab uprisings began to dissipate by 2013, as the outcomes of the uprisings diverged sharply from Turkey's initial expectations: "An excess of optimism dictated Turkey's assertive approach to regional issues"<sup>66</sup> and Turkish FPEs were subject to so-called positive illusions.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the military coup in Egypt in July 2013, which ousted President Morsi and brought General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to power, was a critical turning point. Erdoğan's fierce condemnation of the coup as "a blow to democracy" and his calls for international sanctions against the al-Sisi regime underscored the depth of Turkey's disillusionment.<sup>68</sup> The fall of Morsi marked not only a setback for Turkey's vision of an Islamist-led democratic order but also a blow to its influence in the region. Crucially, the exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood – marked by their designation as a terrorist organization – was a pivotal aspect of this transformation. As the Egyptian military received support from countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, a gradual re-imposition of different authoritarian principles of vision occurred throughout various political fields. Moreover, the EU and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) offered only tepid responses to Turkey's call for stronger condemnation of the coup, revealing Ankara's diplomatic isolation. This period of disillusionment exposed the limitations of Turkey's ability to project its influence in a region where authoritarian structures were more resilient than anticipated. Erdoğan's criticisms of Gulf monarchies for "condoning terrorism" through their support for the coup did little to garner support.<sup>69</sup> Instead, it alienated Turkey from key regional actors like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which supported the military-backed government in Cairo. The return to power of the Egyptian military, culminating in the establishment of the al-Sisi regime, fundamentally reshaped the Egyptian political field.<sup>70</sup> In Libya, Turkey's initial support for a democratic transition also encountered significant obstacles. While Turkey had positioned itself as a mediator and a supporter of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), the country's descent into factionalism and civil war limited Ankara's ability to shape the post-Gaddafi political order. Despite its

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<sup>65</sup> Bechev, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Donelli, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson, 2004.

<sup>68</sup> Kotan, B. N. (2017). An Overview of Turkish-Egyptian Relations Since the Arab Uprising. *TRT World*. <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/an-overview-of-turkish-egyptian-relations-since-the-arab-uprising-12658>.

<sup>69</sup> Pala, Ö., & Aras, B. (2015). Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in the Turkish and Qatari Foreign Policy on the Arab Spring. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 17(3), 296.

<sup>70</sup> D'Alema, 2024; Saaman, J.-L. (2013). The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model in the Arab World. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 12(3).

involvement, including backing Islamist-aligned factions, Turkey found itself increasingly at odds with other regional players, such as Egypt and the UAE, which favored different groups that were seen as “more secular and inclusive of minorities.”<sup>71</sup> The complexity of the Libyan conflict and the competing interests of various actors made it clear that Turkey’s influence in the region was not as decisive as it had hoped. Yet, with hindsight, Turkey used its turnaround in the NATO-led intervention to its advantage. Erdoğan’s visit to Tripoli on 16 September 2011, a day after Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron, signaled Ankara’s support for the National Transition Government (NTC). In the following years, Ankara backed the Justice and Construction Party, aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, and was seen as an AKP’s offshoot. The party came second in the legislative elections in July 2012 and was part of the government until early 2014. Turkey stayed involved in Libyan politics as the country descended into factionalism and conflict. In October 2014, Erdoğan appointed Emrullah İşler, an Arabic-speaking theologian who had served as deputy Prime Minister, as special envoy to the North African country. In the new civil war that later broke out, Turkey backed the so-called Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, established as a result of UN-led negotiations in December 2015. “Turkish involvement was set to increase, leading the way to military intervention in 2019.”<sup>72</sup>

Nonetheless, the scenario that mostly epitomized a radical change in TFP was Syria. Indeed,

When examining Turkey’s intervention in Syria, one can find signs of all of the abovementioned objectives to a varying degree. While its diplomatic pressure on Syria to induce regime change could be linked to the promotion of democracy, its acceptance of millions of refugees could be linked to its humanitarian concerns and its sending of troops to Northern Syria could be related to security considerations. Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, it has become apparent that any of the objectives could gain the upper hand and surpass the others with time.<sup>73</sup>

Undoubtedly, while there are several areas of instability in the Middle East and North Africa quadrant, there is no doubt that the Syrian conflict represents the context that, most of all, has encompassed and continues to affect a mixture of geostrategic, political, and socio-cultural dynamics to such an extent as to change both the entire regional balance and the foreign and domestic policies of individual states. Indeed, although the initial domestic turmoil stemmed from the protest uprisings traceable to the so-called “Arab Springs,” it is abundantly clear that the rapid collapse to civil war in 2011 and the further escalation to a crisis with unsolvable features were both the result of what many have called “competitive interference.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, the deterioration of the Syrian regime and the

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<sup>71</sup> Birand, 2011.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with a Turkish military member.

<sup>73</sup> Sever, A. (2020). Regional Power Role and Intervention: The Turkish Case Over Syria in the 2000s. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 7(2), 147.

<sup>74</sup> Curtis, 2012.

voluptuousness of the situation on the ground created apprehensions concerning a growing precariousness and the emergence of a new power vacuum, but they also have fostered the interference of numerous actors driven by opportunistic, expansionist, or security logics. It is with this background that the conflict quickly took on a profound international dimension, in which Syria became a battleground of a power struggle that, in addition to attracting global actors, encouraged all sides to prefer the remote prospect of a payoff from the continuation of the conflict over a compromise political-diplomatic solution. The consequence has been not only the transformation of the country into a semi-failed state but also, more importantly, the propagation of a spillover effect that has shaken the entire region and the internal security of states in different forms: the proliferation of extremist groups such as ISIS, the devastating human impact in terms of violence and migration phenomena, and the unfreezing of complex dynamics related to the Kurdish issue and ethnic-religious sectarianism.<sup>75</sup> In general, in attempting to shape the Syrian conflict, whether from the perspective of counter-balancing and hegemonic competition between rival actors or from the standpoint of self-defense and national security, external powers initially intervened with the expectation of “a zero-sum victory.” Yet, they have encountered later miscalculations that forced a recalibration of their foreign policies between a continuous “ballet of alliances” and an increased bias toward short-term goals-showing their limitations in the face of the unpredictability and multipolarity of the MENA.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, at the very beginning of the Uprisings in Syria, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu sought to engage Syrian President Bashar al-Assad diplomatically, urging him to implement reforms. When Assad rebuffed, and the regime’s violence escalated, Turkey adopted a more aggressive stance<sup>77</sup> that “demonstrated the gravity of Turkey’s emotional investment in this hegemonic desire.”<sup>78</sup> The core message carried to the Syrian leader in Damascus was that Turkey had “run out of patience.”<sup>79</sup> Back in Ankara, Davutoglu told reporters that

this is our final word to the Syrian authorities. Our first expectation is that these [military] operations stop immediately and unconditionally...If the operations do not end, there would be nothing more to

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<sup>75</sup> Mezran, K., & Varvelli, A. (Eds.). (2019). *The Mena Region: A Great Power Competition*. ISPI-Atlantic Council.

<sup>76</sup> Phillips, C. (2016). *The battle for Syria: International rivalry in the new Middle East*. Yale university press.

<sup>77</sup> “If you want to see someone who has fought until death against his people, just look at Nazi Germany, just look at Hitler...if you cannot draw any lessons from these, then look at the Libyan leader”. Telegraph. 2011. “Syria: Turkish Prime Minister Calls for Assad to Resign.” The Telegraph. (2011, November 22). *Syria: Turkish Prime Minister Calls for Assad to Resign*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/8906532/Syria-Turkish-prime-minister-calls-for-Assad-to-resign.html>

<sup>78</sup> Adisonmez, U. C., & Oztig, L. I. (2024). A Psychoanalytic Approach to Turkish Foreign Policy: Crisis, Disorder, and Disorientation. *Critical Studies on Security*, 1–22.

<sup>79</sup> Bakri, N. (2011, August 9). Turkish Minister and Other Envoys Press Syrian Leader. *New York Times*. [www.nytimes.com/2011/08/10/world/middleeast/10syria.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/10/world/middleeast/10syria.html).



discuss about steps that would be taken.<sup>80</sup> [...] while we hope military intervention will never be necessary, Turkey is preparing for any scenario.<sup>81</sup>

In this sense, by 2012, Turkey's approach to the Syrian crisis evolved from diplomatic engagement to a more assertive and interventionist strategy. Ahmet Davutoğlu emphasized that a "new Middle East" under Turkey's leadership was on the horizon.<sup>82</sup> He declared that "the era of Turkey acting as somebody else's proxy has come to an end. Whatever needs to be said about Syria, it will be decided in Ankara and Istanbul."<sup>83</sup> These statements highlighted Turkey's determination "to shape the regional order in its own terms."<sup>84</sup> Believing that Assad's regime would soon fall, the AKP government shifted towards actively supporting opposition forces with the aim of regime change. In light of these developments – and events, such as the shooting down of a Turkish jet in June 2012 or the killing of civilians by Syrian troops at the Akçakale border – the initial confidence for a quick and promising change was supplanted by concern that the effects of the Syrian crisis were turning into a national security problem. As a result, the Parliament in Ankara passed a motion to authorize extraterritorial operations by its army. However, although there were some targeted military responses on the Turkish side, AKP decision-makers still found "neither the need nor the favorable conditions for a decisive entry of its forces into the field."<sup>85</sup> Alternatively, however, the pursued strategy to support actors and factions that could bring about beneficial change but which, in reality, would prove to be the first steps of TFP toward precise and irreversible choices. This underscores another significant change in TFP, which had traditionally defined non-state actors as terrorist or insurgent groups threatening national security and territorial integrity, demonstrating little inclination for waging proxy wars. However, as the Syrian conflict escalated and allies, including the US and NATO<sup>86</sup>, failed to act decisively, Ankara shifted towards a more independent policy. Turkish decision-makers concluded that toppling the Assad regime could only be achieved by legitimizing and supporting the Syrian opposition's political and armed factions. This was driven by Turkey's frustration with international inaction, particularly regarding its unfulfilled demands for a buffer zone

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<sup>80</sup> Shadid, A. (2011, August 15). Turkey Warns Syria to Stop Crackdown. *New York Times*. [www.nytimes.com/2011/08/16/world/europe/16turkey.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/16/world/europe/16turkey.html).

<sup>81</sup> Toksabay, E. (2011, November 30). Turkey Says Ready for 'Any Scenario' in Syria. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkey-ready-for-any-scenario-in-syria-minister-idUSTRE7AS1KB/>.

<sup>82</sup> Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2012, April 26). *Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun TBMM Genel Kurulu'nda Suriye'deki Olaylar Hakkında Yaptığı Konuşma, 26 Nisan 2012*. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu\\_nun-tbmm-genel-kurulu\\_nda-suriye\\_deki-olaylar-hakkinda-yaptigi-konusma\\_-26-nisan-2012.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-tbmm-genel-kurulu_nda-suriye_deki-olaylar-hakkinda-yaptigi-konusma_-26-nisan-2012.tr.mfa)

<sup>83</sup> Alim, E. (2023). Prudence as an Antidote to Foreign Policy Adventurism: The Case of Turkey in the Syrian Crisis. *Global Society*, 37(2), 304.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with journalist.

<sup>85</sup> Interview.

<sup>86</sup> In his election campaign, Obama promised to "bring the [American] troops home" and, after all, in the words of Hilary Clinton, "Syria was not Libya." Clinton, H. R. (2015). *Hard choices* (First Simon&Schuster trade paperback edition). Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 460-64.

on the border and assistance in managing the refugee crisis. Above all, Turkey's expectations, thus, was the fact that its efforts to call for US support for a more robust intervention against Assad were not met. The Obama administration, wary of becoming entangled in a prolonged conflict, hesitated to take decisive military action. Ömer Taşpınar noted that the dynamic had reversed from a decade earlier:

In Iraq, in 2003, Turkey was asking the US with no small dose of consternation, 'What comes next after the regime falls?' A decade later, the US asked the same question to its Turkish interlocutors.<sup>87</sup>

The divergence between Ankara and Washington became clear when Obama chose not to strike after Assad's chemical attack in Ghouta in 2013, opting instead for a diplomatic solution brokered by Russia. Though the US authorized the CIA's "Timber Sycamore" program to arm vetted militias, it was clear that the administration prioritized avoiding deeper involvement in the Syrian conflict.

This move contradicted Turkish expectations of the US to resolve the conflict, widening the rift between the two. Turkey, along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, established a training center for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) militias – born from the Syrian army's dissidents – in its southern region in 2012. By mid-2012, the FSA seized the Bab al-Hawa crossing border, reinforcing Turkey's strategic position, while Turkish towns and refugee camps along the border became logistical hubs for opposition fighters.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Turkey's influence over the Syrian opposition extended beyond military support. Partnering with Qatar, it backed the Syrian National Council (SNC), a coalition that included many figures from the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>89</sup> This alliance, however, clashed with Saudi Arabia's approach, which aimed to counteract the Brotherhood's influence by incorporating secular and minority groups in an oppositional formation,<sup>90</sup> the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which subsumed the SNC and gained broad support by the West and Arab countries rooting for Assad's removal.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Bechev, 2022, 82.

<sup>88</sup> Balci, B. (2012). Turkey's Relations with the Syrian Opposition. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/13/turkey-s-relations-with-syrian-opposition-pub-47841>

<sup>89</sup> Altunışık & Martin, 2023.

<sup>90</sup> As Mehmet Ali Birand stated in a 2011 article, Syrian state television was accusing Turkey of arming the Syrian Muslim Brothers. He went on to point out that for the Syrian regime the Muslim Brothers were seen as much of a threat to the state as Turkey sees the PKK threat. Birand, M. A. (2011, June 15). Turkey Plans Buffer Zone on Syrian Land. *Hürriyet*. [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-plans-buffer-zone-on-syrian-soil-2011-06-15](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-plans-buffer-zone-on-syrian-soil-2011-06-15).

<sup>91</sup> Both Saudi Arabia and the Syrian National Coalition's leaders were amenable to negotiating with the regime a transition formula based on power-sharing under UN auspices. As the analyst Hassan Hassan observed in 2013: Riyadh today backs Washington's line and has declared an openness to negotiations, although it insists that Iran cannot be part of the process. This openness stands in contrast to Qatar, which (along with Turkey) maintains a desire to see regime change at any cost and which has shown little support for political initiatives, such as the Geneva II initiative backed by US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, or concern with the rise of more radical jihadist forces. Hassan, H. (2013). Syria: The view from the Gulf states. *ECFR*. [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_syria\\_the\\_view\\_from\\_the\\_gulf\\_states135/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_syria_the_view_from_the_gulf_states135/).

Certainly, considering the empirical evidence that “the likelihood of a border state becoming involved in a civil war across the border is high”<sup>92</sup> and recalling how the Syrian space has always been a constant source of concern for Ankara, “the options screened by the AKP did not represent an element of absolute surprise in Turkish foreign doctrine.”<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, what highlighted a change of pace in the 2011-2012 period was the development of a more interventionist approach inclined to deploy with unexpected intensity almost any means necessary to the pursuit of objectives, in contradiction to the Kemalists’ traditional preference for defensive balancing and non-involvement in Middle East unrest.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, this reversal can also be read as the disconnection between objectives and capabilities. Indeed,

even if Turkey chose to spread its gospel, it did not have the means and the resources needed to rise to the challenge at hand. The public broad “caster TRT set up a channel in 2010 but it could not compete with networks with regional coverage, such as Qatar’s Al Jazeera. Out of 135 diplomats working on Arab countries in the early 2010s, only 6 spoke Arabic. The AKP’s party-to-party networks could fill in the gap, but only up to a point.<sup>95</sup>

Paradoxically, then, Turkey’s policy toward Syria has gone from being a symbol and pivot of an indigenous regional stabilization process based on the rejection of international hegemons and horizontal integration to being identified as a major driver of regional instability because

strategic concerns for increased regional leadership through the export of a “Turkish model” of an Islamic/Sunni type of democracy reinforced the Turkish/Islamic identity promoted by the AKP inside and outside Turkey, accentuating, in that respect, a growing (sectarian) identity divide from the Syrian regime and its Iranian ally. As a result, the Syrian crisis also reignited Turkey’s competition with Iran for regional leadership.<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, Turkey had also “overlooked the historical role Iran could play in the Syrian field.”<sup>97</sup> Having welcomed the events as an “Islamic Awakening,” Teheran began to support its long-time ally Assad with money, arms, training, advice, and human resources. Its allies from Hezbollah stepped into the fray and recaptured territory such as the town of al-Qusayr at the border with Lebanon, an operation masterminded by Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force within the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. As such, although it did not enter into full collision with Ankara, Tehran denied the Turks’ objectives. For his part, Erdoğan kept open channels: in June 2014, Rouhani became the first Iranian

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<sup>92</sup> Biddle, S., Friedman, J. A., & Long, S. (2012). Civil War Intervention and the Problem of Iraq1: Civil War Intervention and the Problem of Iraq. *International Studies Quarterly*, 56(1), 85–98.

<sup>93</sup> This was confirmed in some interviews with Turkish officials who closely followed the events.

<sup>94</sup> Salt, J. (2018). Turkey and Syria: When “Soft Power” Turned Hard. *Middle East Policy*, 25(3), 93.

<sup>95</sup> Bechev, 2022, 79. See also Dinçer, O. B., & Kutlay, M. (2012). *Turkey’s power capacity in the Middle East: Limits of the possible: an empirical analysis* (First edition). International Strategic Research Organization.

<sup>96</sup> Hokayem, E. (2012). Syria and its Neighbours. *Survival*, 54(2), 7–14.

<sup>97</sup> Interview.

President to visit Turkey for nearly two decades and, in contrast to Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, Turkey welcomed the nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA), signed by Iran and the P5+1.

In response, the Turkish government's decision to position Turkey as a leader in the "anti-Assad coalition," known as the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCT),<sup>98</sup> further complicated its regional standing. This alignment led Iran to perceive Turkey's positioning as "conditioned by the agenda of a pro-Sunni bloc dominated by Riyadh and the Israeli-US axis opposed to the Syria-Iran duo."<sup>99</sup> This situation alienated Turkey on various fronts and exposed the country to the complexities of managing a broad coalition of third-party actors. While the coalition was crucial in seizing territory from the regime in the eastern sector, its lack of a unified strategy and over-reliance on various non-state actors only deepened the militarization of the conflict, leading to further fragmentation within the FSA. Indeed, the latter proved to be a "poorly organized armed group lacking ideological unity and central control, with limited ability to formulate or implement a coherent military strategy."<sup>100</sup> While the FSA was initially established as the armed wing of the Syrian opposition and aimed to attract defectors from the Syrian army, its scarce cohesion over time allowed for infiltration by jihadist and fundamentalist entities. As such, "by trying to keep pace with the shifting dynamics on the ground, Turkey dragged itself into perilous alliances"<sup>101</sup>, especially when it began openly supporting Salafist militias like Ahrar al-Sham and Jayish al-Islam outside the FSA, forming the so-called Islamic Front.<sup>102</sup> However, even this strategy failed to deliver a decisive blow to Assad's forces as the conflict reached a stalemate, with neither the Assad regime, backed by Iran and Hezbollah nor the rebel forces supported by Turkey and Sunni powers, achieving a definitive victory.

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<sup>98</sup> Composed of France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and supported by the US alongside Lebanese and Libyan militias.

<sup>99</sup> For the original, see Milliyet. (2011, April 28). *Suriye, 'güzel ve yalnız ülke'*. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/nuray-mert/suriye-guzel-ve-yalniz-ulke-1383223>

<sup>100</sup> Işıksal & Göksel, 2018, 26; See also Lynch, 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Interview.

<sup>102</sup> The Guardian. (2013, May 8). *Free Syrian Army rebels defect to Islamist group Japhat al-Nusra*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/08/free-syrian-army-rebels-defect-islamist-group>.

Amid this stalemate, the emerging power vacuum between Syrian and Iraqi territories favored the rise and strengthening of radical groups such as the al-Nusra Front<sup>103</sup> and ISIS<sup>104</sup>, with the latter sooner controlling a vast territory stretching from the outskirts of Baghdad all the way to the Homs governorate in Syria, including the oil-rich province of Deir el-Zor in the country's east. Concurrently, territorial fragmentation also created a suitable ground for the growth of pro-Kurdish independentist forces in Syria, among which the YPG (People's Protection Units) emerged as the leading militant group and, later in 2015, the primary component of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).<sup>105</sup> In this situation, Turkey faced a complex dilemma: while it tolerated al-Nusra due to its effectiveness against both Assad and Kurdish militias, ISIS's rapid rise after capturing Mosul in 2014 and declaring a global caliphate posed a significant threat. ISIS's brutal tactics, territorial ambitions, and ability to attract recruits through propaganda further destabilized the region, undermining Turkey's broader strategic goals. Though ISIS pressured Assad's regime, it also fought against FSA factions and other Islamist militias aligned with Ankara, creating additional challenges for Turkey. Concurrently, the Turks felt isolated when, in December 2012, the Obama administration blacklisted those forces supported by Turkey, which by that point numbered some 10,000 fighters. In the words of Nuh Yılmaz, of the SETA think-tank and subsequently MIT,

Ankara was antagonized by Washington's decision to add the most effective rebel fighting force [. . .] to its list of international terror organizations. Turkish officials saw this as weakening the opposition and reinforcing the narrative of the Assad regime.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Formed in 2012, in November of that year it was described al-Nusra as "the most aggressive and successful" of the rebel forces. While other rebel groups were focused on ending the decades-long reign of the Assad family, the al-Nusra Front also sought the unification of Islamist forces in post-Assad Syria, anticipating a new stage of the civil war. It denounced the international assistance in support of the Syrian opposition as "imperialism," viewing it as a long-term threat to its Islamist goals in Syria. In April 2013, Al-Nusra Front was publicly confirmed as the official Syrian affiliate of al-Qaeda after Emir Ayman al-Zawahiri rejected the forced merger attempted by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ordered the dissolution of the newly-formed Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. In March 2015, the militia joined other Syrian Islamist groups to form a joint command center called the Army of Conquest. In July 2016, al-Nusra formally re-designated itself from Jabhat al-Nusra to Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (Front for the Conquest of the Levant) and officially announced that it was breaking ties with Al-Qaeda. See Adraoui, M. A. (2019). The case of Jabhat Al-Nusra in the Syrian conflict 2011–2016: Towards a strategy of nationalization?. *Mediterranean Politics*, 24(2), 260-267.

<sup>104</sup> Its self-proclaimed emir, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, affirmed the establishment of a caliphate, dubbed "the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," in the territories of Iraq and Syria of which he proclaimed himself caliph on June 29, 2014. Prior to that proclamation, the group called itself *Daesh*, translated as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL): in fact, the Arabic word *Shām* denotes that geographic region that includes southern Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Palestine and is referred to as "Greater Syria" or "Levant." For a survey, see Plebani, A. (2017). Emerging trends in the broader jihadi galaxy: Between radicalization and new models of jihadism. In M. Demichelis & P. Maggiolini (Eds.), *The Struggle to Define a Nation* (pp. 439–468). Gorgias Press.

<sup>105</sup> Created in October 2015 with US support, the SDF is a multi-ethnic coalition of Kurdish, Arabic, and Christian fighters. However, it is dominated by the YPG, established three years earlier. Ultimately, the SDF hopes to gain international recognition for its autonomous region, similar to that of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government, but not necessarily as a fully independent nation-state. The YPG follows the 'democratic nation' philosophy of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, a decentralised 'radical democracy' based on local councils, gender equality, and ethnic and religious pluralism. See the ECFR report here, <https://ecfr.eu/special/mena-armed-groups/syrian-democratic-forces-syria/>.

<sup>106</sup> Yılmaz, N. (2013). Turkey: Goodbye to Zero Problems with Neighbors. In D. Levy & J. Barnes-Dacey (Eds.), *The Regional Struggle for Syria*. ECFR, 71.

In this realm, al-Nusra cooperated with the FSA against the regime and fought Kurdish militias east of the Euphrates, a reason enough for Ankara to tolerate it and even back it, for example, by allowing it access to Turkish territory during offensives against Syrian Kurds. That is why, back in 2013, Yılmaz observed that “further tensions between Ankara and Washington may lie ahead over the Syrian endgame.”<sup>107</sup>

### **7.1.2. The Reversal of TFP: Interventionism, Unilateralism and Securitization**

By 2013, the international and regional context that had previously created a permissive environment for Turkey’s foreign policy ambitions had changed. With its room for maneuver reduced, Ankara found itself in an evolving setting where the “Arab Springs” swiftly degenerated into an “Arab Winter”<sup>108</sup> that provoked complex security configurations in the MENA and beyond. Primarily, the Turkish stance in the region vis-a-vis this multilevel crisis did not succeed in influencing the trajectory of a broad political and systemic change.<sup>109</sup> Rather, Turkey’s perceived support for Islamist groups and its involvement in Syria through various proxies rendered the country to make unpredictable moves and form short-lived and vaguely defined alliances that seriously put its international reputation<sup>110</sup> and decades-long alliances with Western partners at stake.<sup>111</sup> Overall, this paved the way for another and more critical deviation of TFP after 2012: a move toward interventionist and risky attitudes in regional crises combined with a “more fluid” and transactional conception of alliances.<sup>112</sup>

#### **7.1.2.1. Interventionism in Syria: Between Russia and the US (and Iran)**

In Syria, TFP reversals mainly reside in the external level, which revealed that a passive and cautious strategy was not feasible.<sup>113</sup> The Arab Uprising intensified the regional power struggle among blocs led by Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, with spillover effects also for the regional states’

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<sup>107</sup> Yılmaz, 2012, 71..

<sup>108</sup> Byman, D. L. (2011). After the Hope of the Arab Spring, the Chill of an Arab Winter. *Brookings*.

<sup>109</sup> Aydın, M., & Dizdaroğlu, C. (2018). Levantine Challenges on Turkish Foreign Policy. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 15(60), 89–103.

<sup>110</sup> Öniş, Z. (2014). Turkey and the Arab Revolutions: Boundaries of Regional Power Influence in a Turbulent Middle East. *Mediterranean Politics*, 19(2), 203–219; Yeşilyurt 2017, 74.

<sup>111</sup> Adisonmez & Oztig, 2024, 9.

<sup>112</sup> Idem.

<sup>113</sup> This situation also accords with empirical findings that any state that “shares a land border with the civil war state is more likely to experience spillover effects,” such as the flow of refugees. See Alim, 2022.

internal equilibrium and security realm. As the Syrian civil war became more entrenched, Ankara struggled to assert regional leadership, having miscalculated the potential of Islamist movements, its own influence capabilities, and the responses of other regional and global actors.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, Turkey's involvement had significant humanitarian repercussions. The influx of over 3.5 million Syrian refugees into Turkey created economic<sup>115</sup> and social strains,<sup>116</sup> challenging Turkey's initial humanitarian "open door policy" rhetoric and soft power credibility.<sup>117</sup> The result was the transition toward a security-driven policy based on the notion of containment and status quo orientation based on three main pillars: (1) to contain refugees in Turkey; (2) to contain the ISIS problem in the MENA region, mainly in Syria and Iraq; and (3) to balance Iran's regional hegemonic aspirations.<sup>118</sup> This shift marked "a double backward step towards a position akin to the pre-AKP era when Turkey's neighborhood was mainly perceived through the lenses of security and fear for national borders."<sup>119</sup> As mentioned, one main factor was the rise of the PYD/YPG pro-Kurdish groups in the proximity of Turkish southern and south-eastern borders. To be clear, at the beginning of the conflict, Ankara had engaged with the PYD as part of its broader approach against Assad's regime<sup>120</sup> and on the wave of the AKP's "peace process" with Kurdish parties and the PKK. However, the collapse of the process in 2015<sup>121</sup>, the subsequent rise of Kurdish political instances and parties domestically, and the

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<sup>114</sup> Yeşilyurt, 2017, 76.

<sup>115</sup> "On the economic side, the government has allocated significant resources to the Syrian refugees residing in the country, and "the total cost of hosting refugees in Turkey between 2011 and 2022 has been estimated to be about \$US50 billion. Tumen, S. (n.d.). *The Case of Syrian Refugees in Türkiye: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned*," *Background paper to the World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/a007833298df4b9c3735602711dd9289-0050062023/original/WDR2023-Turkey-case-study-FORMATTED>

<sup>116</sup> Unofficial numbers might have reached more than 6 million at the peak of the conflict. Border provinces, such as Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa, have been the most affected by the refugee crisis. Turkey's hosting of millions of Syrian refugees with very limited aid from the international community empowered Turkey's claim to become involved in Syria out of necessity and partly improved its normative outlook in its regional relations. In 2017, 98 % of Turkish humanitarian expenditures were allocated to support Syrian refugees, which made Turkey the most generous donor to the Syrians. See Çevik, 2019, 8. According to the government figures, the cost of the refugees reached to about US\$30 billion. See Salt, 2018, 81. Nonetheless, it seems that Turkey's sacrifice of accepting such a large number of refugees fell short of saving Turkey's soft power credentials and reputation. For example, demands for housing and other facilities in Turkish border cities have increasingly created economic and social discomfort and occasionally tension between locals and Syrian refugees. The refugee issue has come to be perceived as both a humanitarian and a security issue. In addition to the inter-societal tensions that refugees started to cause, the refugees caused "transnational diffusion" of armed groups and weapons. Secen, S., Al, S., & Arslan, B. (2024). Electoral dynamics, new nationalisms, and party positions on Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 25(3), 419–449.

<sup>117</sup> Davutoğlu proclaimed his country's open-door policy by stating that Turkey was ready to allow those Syrians "who are not happy at home" into the country, but he did not foresee that millions of them would be crossing the border. See Korkut, U. (2016). Pragmatism, moral responsibility or policy change: The Syrian refugee crisis and selective humanitarianism in the Turkish refugee regime. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 4(1), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Keyman 2016, 2280.

<sup>119</sup> Interview.

<sup>120</sup> PYD leader Salih Muslim reportedly visited Turkey several times for political meetings, highlighting a period when Turkey saw these regional Kurdish actors not as immediate threats but as entities that could be negotiated with. The relocation of the tomb of Süleyman Şah in 2015 to a PYD-controlled area further illustrated this phase of tactical cooperation, although Turkey never officially confirmed collaboration with the PYD. Özer, V. (2014, December 12). A conversation with Salih Muslim. *Hürriyet*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/verda-ozet/a-conversation-with-salih-muslim-75570>

<sup>121</sup> This issue will be further examined in the internal level section. Here it is worth mentioning that the collapse of the peace process not only entailed a setback in domestic politics in terms of individual and sociopolitical rights as well as the role of Kurdish political entities. Rather, it also triggered a new escalation of violence within Turkish borders characterized by the Kurdish group's terrorist attacks and harsh counter-operations by Turkey's military. See Arslan, S. (2019). Transborder Ethnic Kin and the Dynamics of Peace

territorial expansion of their Syrian-affiliated militias in the region began to be perceived as a security threat by Ankara's decision-makers. When the PYD and YPG declared the formation of an independent area called "Rojava" in the proximity of Turkish borders, the government categorized and countered them as terrorist organizations like the PKK. In sum,

Turkey shifted its policy from pushing for Assad's removal to focusing on neutralizing the emerging Kurdish threat along its border. The Turkish leadership came to view the PYD/YPG's consolidation in northern Syria as a more pressing concern than the survival of Assad. Ankara feared the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish entity, which could foster separatist sentiment among Turkey's Kurdish population.<sup>122</sup>

This also explains why, despite ISIS's rise, Turkey did not immediately see it as an existential threat, considering it a "symptom" of the broader conflict fueled by Assad's tactics.<sup>123</sup> On the one hand, the pattern of Turkey's border management in these stages of the conflict can be seen as a factor that – more or less voluntarily – contributed to the strengthening of extremist groups in terms of personnel, operational networks, and economic resources.<sup>124</sup> Despite all its public denials, Turkey was accused of overlooking military dispatches to some jihadist groups in Syria and becoming a transit point for the "foreign fighters" who went to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS as well.<sup>125</sup> In this regard, several investigations fueled suspicions that Ankara was using the lability of its border to finance relevant actors in the jihadist galaxy – such as the Jaysh al-Fateh Front – in order to facilitate the pursuit of a kind of "covert military intervention against pro-Kurdish forces."<sup>126</sup> Seemingly, "the ambiguity between demands for aid in strengthening the borders for humanitarian/security reasons and the practices implemented on the level contributed to mistrust among regional and international allies, who were increasingly reticent to support Ankara's requests."<sup>127</sup> To put it in another way, although it

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Processes: Insights from the Kurdish Conflict. *Civil Wars*, 21(3), 410–433; Kemahlioğlu, Ö. (2015). Winds of Change? The June 2015 Parliamentary Election in Turkey. *South European Society and Politics*, 20(4), 445–464; Abrami et al., 2025.

<sup>122</sup> Interview.

<sup>123</sup> Bechev, 2022.

<sup>124</sup> Okay, A. S. (2017). Turkey's post-2011 approach to its Syrian border and its implications for domestic politics. *International Affairs*, 93(4), 838.

<sup>125</sup> In September 2013, the liberalleftist Turkish newspaper Radikal pointed out several cases of Turkish ISIS fighters and authorities' inaction after reports from families. In January 2014, the Gendarmerie stopped four trucks in Hatay and Adana that were reportedly escorted by MİT officers; the trucks contained ammunition and arms, including missiles, mortars, and anti-aircraft ammunition, which the Gendarmerie confiscated. Erdoğan and Interior Minister Ekan Ala claimed that the prosecutors who ordered the search were Gülenists and then had them and the officers conducting the investigation arrested on suspicion of espionage, thus portraying the search as part of the Gülenist attempt to overthrow the government. After Turkey's oldest newspaper, Cumhuriyet, published the story the following May, the paper's editor-in-chief, Can Dündar, and Ankara bureau chief, Erdem Gül, were arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for revealing state secrets. Initially, they were also charged with aiding a terrorist organization—the Gülen movement. On June 15, 2017, CHP lawmaker Enis Berberoğlu was sentenced by a local court to 25 years in jail for providing Cumhuriyet with information about the Adana incident. See Uslu, E. (2016). *Jihadist Highway to Jihadist Haven: Turkey's Jihadi Policies and Western Security*. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 39(9), 781–802.

<sup>126</sup> It was an informal coalition made of former Al-Qaeda factions like Jabhat Al-Nusra e Ahrar al-Sham, and other groups linked to the FSA. Krishnan, A. (2019). Controlling partners and proxies in pro-insurgency paramilitary operations: The case of Syria. *Intelligence and National Security*, 34(4), 544–560. For a comprehensive scheme, see Cafarella, J., & Casagrande, G. (2015). *Syrian Opposition Guide*. Institute for the Study of War.

<sup>127</sup> Interview.



would be erroneous to draw a direct line between Turkish interests and those of the various extremist factions in the war, it is evident how, even in the face of the rise of ISIS as a global threat, Turkey's strategies began to diverge with the US ones. While the former was preoccupied with rising Kurdish forces, the latter began to see the same militias as strategic proxies for counterterrorism activities. In such a situation, "Turkish decision-makers not only failed to perceive the long-term negative effects associated with the jihadist threat but also endorsed practices that differed from those of Saudi Arabia and Gulf states to strengthen its own influence in a possible post-conflict scenario."<sup>128</sup> On the other hand, after the initial underestimation of the problem, the consequences of the emergence of ISIS as a significant player directly affected the country's security interests. First, the expansion of ISIS in Syria undermined the positioning of pro-Turkish militias and helped to flake the Sunni front from within, recruiting fighters from its ranks and delegitimizing the image and capacity for action of the IMCT. On the other hand, in addition to the occupation of the Turkish consulate in Mosul (Iraq), Turkish borders themselves were shaken by terrorist attacks.<sup>129</sup> These developments prompted the government to authorize the participation of the Turkish Armed Forces in the anti-ISIS International Coalition led by the US and NATO, as well as a historic concession of the İncirlik air base to the Americans.

Nonetheless, the limitations in conducting these operations, the complex synthesis between the interests of multiple coalition actors, and the poor results of supporting the forces of increasingly less moderate Syrian opposition forces against ISIS had a paradoxical effect. First, the reluctant alignment with the West military actions revealed Turkey's limited ability to control the trajectory of the conflict. Second, and more concretely, it added another source of concern among Turkish policymakers since Washington openly began to support the newly formed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as a bastion of its counterterrorism operations in 2015. This fear led to Turkey's unilateral military interventions, such as "Operation Euphrates Shield" in August 2016 – aimed at pushing both ISIS and Kurdish forces away from Turkey's border – and "Operation Olive Branch" in January 2018. As the Turkish Presidential Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın declared, Turkey had "the right to self-defense"<sup>130</sup> against threats from Syria, emphasizing the focus on creating a security belt to prevent cross-border attacks. These operations were not conducted in a strategic vacuum but were heavily influenced by broader geopolitical shifts and Turkey's need to balance relations with other

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<sup>128</sup> Interview.

<sup>129</sup> Starting from the Reyhanlı-Hatay border (2013) and going up through Suruç-Şanlıurfa (2015) would later reach as far as the capital (2015) and Istanbul (2015, 2017).

<sup>130</sup> Alirıza, B. (2018). Understanding Turkey's Afrin operation. *CSIS*.

powers. Indeed, with the US decision to support the YPG as ground forces against ISIS, Ankara's relationship with Washington became strained. However, the real "game changer was Russia's unexpected intervention in Syria in 2015"<sup>131</sup>, and the subsequent direct involvement of its military forces changed the dynamics on the ground.<sup>132</sup> From the Turkish perspective, Moscow's entry emphasized the AKP government's shift in priorities from invoking regime change to a securitization policy aimed at circumventing any independence plans of Kurdish political-military units in northeastern Syria.<sup>133</sup> However, until late 2015, Russia's support for the latter was instrumental in helping the regime wrest territory from pro-Turkish forces. Moreover, the increasing militarization of the two countries' approaches created various forms of friction, later culminating in an open crisis with the downing of a Russian jet by the Turkish forces.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, although Russia's drastic reactions ended the cordial *modus vivendi* of earlier periods for a while<sup>135</sup>, some other factors immediately forced policymakers in Ankara to make a pragmatic U-turn within a more restrictive environment.<sup>136</sup>

At this point, it is worth noting how the various nuances of these changes have taken on more pronounced hues since the failed coup in Turkey in 2016, which has significantly impacted both the mode of action of the AKP-led government – which became more authoritarian and prone to out-of-country interventionism – and the different perceptions and reactions of external actors – which became more or less "friendly."<sup>137</sup> First, the developments (directly or indirectly) related to the attempted coup signaled an acceleration, and perhaps the culmination, of the already ongoing deterioration between Ankara and its Euro-Atlantic partners. From a symbolic perspective, the absence or delay of explicit condemnation against the anti-Erdogan coup by the latter has ignited in Turkey a deep anti-American and "European betrayal" sentiment.<sup>138</sup> From a substantive point of view, however, Turkish dissatisfaction originated from the growing divergences related to the developments of specific scenarios in which the foreign policies of Ankara, Washington, and the

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<sup>131</sup> Many interviews with Turkish and US experts and officials confirmed that neither Turkey nor the US were really prepared for a Russian direct involvement on the ground.

<sup>132</sup> Charap, S. (2013). Russia, Syria and the doctrine of intervention. *Survival*, 55(1), 35–41.

<sup>133</sup> See the special issue Kortunov, A., & Erşen, E. (2018). Introduction: Deepening Turkey-Russia Relations. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 23(2), 1–3.

<sup>134</sup> Erşen, E. (2017). Evaluating the Fighter Jet Crisis in Turkish-Russian Relations. *Insight Turkey*, 19(4), 85–104.

<sup>135</sup> Idem. The measures included an almost total shutdown of bilateral relations, a broad embargo, inviting Kurdish factions into the Geneva peace talks and opening a YPG office in its borders.

<sup>136</sup> "There was also a round of intense secret "diplomacy involving the then Chief of the Turkish General Staff, General Hulusi Akar, the businessman and former Minister Cavit Çağlar, and the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev." Hale, W. (2019). Turkey, America, Russia and the Syrian Civil War. *Insight Turkey*, 21(4), 31.

<sup>137</sup> The necessity to restructure Turkey's domestic and foreign policies was supported by many pro-government circles. See, for instance, Duran & Kanat, 2020. For more critical analyses, see Dalacoura, 2017; S. Özel, *At the End of the Day, Where Will Turkey Stand?*, IAI Commentaries; Aras, B. (2019). The Crisis and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy After July 15. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 44(1), 6–18.

<sup>138</sup> Reinvigorated by a counter-narrative that to this day mixes, both at the leadership level and within the population, conspiratorial traits and nationalistic overtones. See Soler i-Lecha, 2024.

traditional allies have entered a spiral of misalignment. The primary source of discontent arose from the fact that, even during the gradual territorial retreat of ISIS in Syria, the US continued to support the Kurdish YPG militias. Subsequently, despite the initial trust placed in the good personal relationship between the respective newly appointed Presidents, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Donald J. Trump, in 2017, the repeated risks of escalation on the ground soured the Ankara-Washington axis. In addition, the general deterioration of bilateral relations was affected by the inability to mediate issues that had long remained open.<sup>139</sup> A similar degree of misunderstanding and divergence, although mitigated by economic interdependence, also affected Turkey's relations with the EU and with the most active players on its southern flank, where the fragility and politicization of agreements on immigration, energy disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkish intervention in Libya originated a twofold effect. On the one hand, a structural alienation of Turkey from the process of "Europeanization," its isolation from Brussels policies, and growing distrust with its European partners; on the other hand, a tendency of the latter to devise new strategies with countries such as Israel and Egypt, but also Cyprus and the UAE, which have become direct competitors for Turkish goals.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, "when Putin reached out to Erdoğan right after the Turkish coup attempt on 15 July 2016, he knew he was knocking on an open door."<sup>141</sup> This was probably already clear from President Erdoğan's letter of apology that had appealed to tones of "friendship and strategic partnership."<sup>142</sup> These dynamics showed not only an explicit recognition of Russia's vital importance for Turkey's energy and economic necessities but also the realization that the achievement of short-term goals would now have to come through a return to cooperation with Moscow and Tehran.<sup>143</sup> In this sense, such contingencies represented a further watershed for the new direction of TFP, "which

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<sup>139</sup> Such as the case of the imprisonment of U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson, the request for the extradition of alleged coup-maker Fetullah Gülen, and the links between the unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA and the financial investigations into Turkish wrongdoing in circumventing sanctions against Iran. See Aydıntaşbaş, A. (2018). The pastor, the banker, and the irresistible drama in Turkish-US relations. *ECFR*.

<sup>140</sup> Soler i-Lecha, 2024; Talbot, V. (2021). *The scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean*. Ledizioni.

<sup>141</sup> Expert of Turkey-Russia relations. "After all, Russia had banned Gülen's movement in the mid-2000s, while the US, tellingly, failed to extradite the leader of "the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization," safe in his Pennsylvania compound.16 Putin claimed to be a standard-bearer of the status quo, in contrast to Washington's meddling in other countries' internal affairs and undermining their duly elected leaders. As the insightful Turkish political analyst Soli Özel has observed, "[i]n contrast to the West's passivity as the coup unfolded, Russia stood by Ankara. Many Turks were deeply disappointed with the West's lack of solidarity at the time." See Özel, S. (2020). Whither Turkey-Russia Relations. *Robert Bosch Academy*. [www.robertboschacademy.de/de/perspectives/whither-turkey-russia-relations](http://www.robertboschacademy.de/de/perspectives/whither-turkey-russia-relations); Aktürk, Ş. (2019). Relations between Russia and Turkey Before, During, and After the Failed Coup of 2016. *Insight Turkey*, 21(4), 97–114.

<sup>142</sup> TRTHaber. (2016, June 27). *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Putin'e mektup gönderdi*. <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-Erdogan-putine-mektup-gonderdi-258503.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Yetkin, M. (2016, August 9). Story of Secret Diplomacy that Ended Russia-Turkey Jet Crisis. *Hürriyet*. From Moscow's perspective, on the other hand, the reopening and facilitation of such an arrangement with Turkey found its origin in certain prerogatives that were indispensable to make its own politico-military exposure in the Syrian crisis tolerable in the long run: first, the possibility of exerting, albeit indirectly, greater pressure on Syrian rebel groups through Ankara's privileged channel and thus securing a broker role in the conflict, consistent with the pragmatism of Russia's new doctrine in the Middle East; second, the opportunity to shape conditions on the battlefield and create mechanisms in the diplomatic sphere such as to deter significant interference from the Euro-Atlantic front. See Stepanova, E. (2018). Russia and Conflicts in the Middle East: Regionalisation and Implications for the West. *The International Spectator*, 53(4), 35–57.

became driven more by immediate obligations than long-term strategic choices.”<sup>144</sup> If Ankara certainly saw its influence in Syria increase, it began simultaneously to subordinate its pursuit to a delicate balancing act with the other actors involved.

An immediate consequence of this concatenation of elements was undoubtedly Turkey's initiation of Operation Euphrates Shield (August 24, 2016) and the subsequent shaping of what would become a trend in subsequent developments. First, Ankara benefited from veiled Russian help in deterring “second-tiered pro-regime forces.” Second, the *quid pro quo* for Moscow was a restrictive ceasefire for opposition forces, including pro-Turkish ones, and their classification as terrorist organizations.<sup>145</sup> Finally, the military operation also benefited from a gradual shift in Iran’s posture, which, while still not renouncing the marriage of interest between Kurdish and pro-Shiite militias in opposition to Turkish moves, limited its position to one defined as “cautiously supportive” of Ankara’s security demands. The most striking result of the interdependence between the elements examined so far is undoubtedly the “Astana process.” A Russian-sponsored forum with Turkey and Iran since December 2016, it aimed to create a new platform for dialogue and joint negotiations involving the Syrian regime and various actors in the conflict for a gradual path of peacebuilding. Although born out of Moscow’s resolve to establish itself as a preeminent actor capable of shaping Syria’s fate, the high number of formal and informal summits contributed to sidelining the attempts made with the UN-sponsored Geneva rounds. Moreover, Ankara saw its request to open up to the participation of various opposition factions fulfilled and, as a result, an opportunity to increase its influence over the fate of the conflict as a guarantor. Similarly, Teheran saw a chance to revive its role as a direct conduit with the Damascus regime and claim future credit for its military engagement.<sup>146</sup>

Certainly, this trilateral consensus did not lack misunderstandings and divergences, as in the case of the contentious issue of control of the Idlib area, especially after Turkey launched its second military operation (Olive Branch) in 2018.<sup>147</sup> However, what produced a partial but significant readjustment that still characterizes the scenario today was how US President Trump attempted to communicate and then implement a drastic change of Washington’s course in Syria. Initially, the US

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<sup>144</sup> This was confirmed in many of the interviews with diplomats, officers, and some military members.

<sup>145</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>146</sup> Cengiz, S. (2020). Assessing the Astana Peace Process for Syria: Actors, Approaches, and Differences. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 7(2), 200–214.

<sup>147</sup> In fact, Operation Olive Branch (January 20, 2018) was a turning point that made the need for compromise increasingly clear, as the TSK and its ally ESL were only able to wrest the Afrin area from Kurdish hands thanks to a concerted removal of the Russian “security umbrella,” which was then reciprocated by Turkey’s lack of opposition to Moscow and Tehran’s intervention alongside Assad to permanently liberate the Ghouta area from Islamist rebel forces. See International Crisis Group. (2018). Prospects for a Deal to Stabilise Syria’s North East. *Middle East Report*, 190.; Yeşiltaş, M., Seren, M., & Özçelik, N. (2017). *Operation Euphrates Shield: Implementation and lessons learned*. SETA.

appeared to seek an understanding with Turkey regarding the creation of a safe zone along almost the entirety of its southern border. Still, the ambiguity of the American posture instead fostered new tensions with Ankara. This culminated in the latter's acquisition of the Russian S-400 defense system in opposition to NATO's, a rhetorical clash between the respective Presidents,<sup>148</sup> and repeated threats from the Turkish side of a new military intervention.<sup>149</sup> While Turkey called the acquisition of S-400 from Russia "a matter of national sovereignty,"<sup>150</sup> such steps forced the US to follow a rigid strategic policy against Turkey, culminating in its exclusion from the F-35 fighter jet program and the imposition of CAATSA sanctions.<sup>151</sup> At the same time, however, the diplomatic game in the background should not be overlooked. According to some, Ankara had constantly sent messages to the US, "arguing that Turkey had to turn to Russia because "the Americans refused to provide a much-needed missile system."<sup>152</sup> However, according to Amanda Sloat, a US Deputy Secretary of State at the time, Ankara's assertion did not exactly reflect the truth:

There were long discussions between the previous Obama administration and the Turkish government – including Congress – about America's intention to sell the Patriot. Turkey had certain demands on technology transfer and fees that the United States was not able to meet easily. Thus, there was no agreement on the terms of the sale and no refusal of the US government on selling the Patriots to Turkey.<sup>153</sup>

However, according to Trump's former advisor, Herbert Raymond McMaster, the situation seemed to be slightly different:

Erdogan, like Putin, had figured out how to play to Trump's distaste for sustained military operations in the Middle East. Erdogan described continued arms transfers to the SDF as a "waste of money. [...] Erdogan "lied" to Trump to prevent the development of a Kurdish army that might seek independence in Syria and lay claim to parts of eastern Turkey long sought by Kurdish nationalists. Trump fell for it. "You're right, it is ridiculous, [Trump told Erdogan], I told General McMaster no weapons to anyone, now that it is over. I told General McMaster that to his face!."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> The Independent. (2018, February 15). *Turkish President Erdoğan offers US 'Ottoman slap' ahead of Rex Tillerson's visit to Turkey*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/turkey-us-President-Erdoğan-rex-tillerson-ottoman-slap-visit-secretary-state-a8212731.html>. Also emblematic were Erdoğan's statements, "A country we call an ally insists on forming an army of terror on our border? [...] Our mission is to strangle it before it is even born. Wintour, P. (2018, January 15). Erdoğan Accuses U.S. of Planning to Form 'Terror Army' in Syria. *The Guardian*.

<sup>149</sup> Hoffman, M. (2021). Flashpoints in U.S.-Turkey Relations in 2021. *Center for American Progress*.

<sup>150</sup> McKernan, B. (2019, July 12). Russian Missile Delivery to Turkey Strains Ally's Relations with US. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/12/russian-missile-delivery-to-turkey-strains-allys-relations-with-us>.

<sup>151</sup> Kibaroglu, M. (2019). On Turkey's Missile Defense Strategy: The Four Faces of the S-400 Deal between Turkey and Russia. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 24(2), 159–174.

<sup>152</sup> Yilmaz, 2021, 149.

<sup>153</sup> Toroglu, M. (2019, December 28). Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinin Zor Yılı. *Amerikanın Sesi*. <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/t%C3%BCrk-amerikan-i%C3%87li%C5%9Fkilerinin-zor-y%C4%B1%C4%B1/5223439.html>

<sup>154</sup> Soylu, R. (2024, August 27). Erdogan "played" Trump and lied to him on Syria, former Trump advisor McMaster says. *Middle East Eye*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/erdogan-played-trump-and-lied-him-syria-former-trump-advisor-mcmaster-says> Retrieved from the original book of McMaster, "At War with Ourselves: My Tour of Duty in the Trump White House", published in 2024.

Against this backdrop, Trump's announcement for a US disengagement<sup>155</sup> at the expense of its Kurdish "allies" was interpreted by Ankara<sup>156</sup> as a green light for the October 9, 2019, Operation Peace-Spring.<sup>157</sup> Undertaken with the official goal of fighting YPG-PKK forces in northeastern Syria and creating a security zone to facilitate the return of thousands of refugees, in reality, it served to complete the creation of its zone of influence.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, the posture of Moscow and Tehran played a crucial role in the setting of this operation. Although they preferred total control of the Damascus regime (contrary to Turkish interest), they were neither taken by surprise nor unprepared to reap the dividends of their own strategies. There seemed to be little doubt about a green light from Putin on the eve of the intervention, which then became explicit during the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, in which he called for "the withdrawal of any foreign forces illegally present on the ground" except for "legitimate" ones.<sup>159</sup>

While it is not the primary goal of this thesis to deepen its analysis of the Syrian war further, it is essential to note the results of Ankara's evolving posture on this specific issue. For some, "With a 'kind of ability' to adapt to the changing situation on the ground and the international climate, with a skillful dosage of pragmatism and unscrupulousness in reshaping its posture," it has achieved a starring role in the Syrian issue.<sup>160</sup> In the pro-government circle, indeed, the vision was that "Turkey has been following a multilateral and proactive policy for its interests."<sup>161</sup> Similarly, some Turkish realist scholars assert that it "pursued a proactive security policy by using military power outside its

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<sup>155</sup> In the face of fierce criticisms from his domestic critics, he claimed that "it is time for us to get out of these ridiculous endless wars, many of them tribal, and bring our soldiers home." See Bethan 2019.

<sup>156</sup> In contradiction with his previous statements, on his Twitter account, Trump shared this message: "If Turkey does anything that I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, consider to be off limits, I will totally destroy and obliterate the economy of Turkey (I've done it before!)." Moreover, after the meeting with congressional leaders regarding Syria, Trump wrote a heavy-handed letter to Erdoğan, arguing that Turkey's military operations toward Syria were a mistake. In the letter, which appeared to be written in undiplomatic language, Trump stated, "Don't be a tough guy. Don't be a fool!" adding, "I will call you later." Such language had not been used in Turkish-US history since President Lyndon Johnson's letter of 1964. Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman also stated that "the Department of Defense made clear to Turkey – as did the President that we do not endorse a Turkish operation in Northern Syria." Trump's domestic critics in Congress and elsewhere described his decision as a 'disaster in the making,' demonstrating a 'complete lack of understanding of anything happening on the ground. See Reuters. (2019, October 7). *Trump threatens to "obliterate" Turkey's economy if it takes "off-limits" actions*. According to a later statement by a U.S. official, the joint security mechanism, with joint patrols, had been working well, but in the crucial telephone conversation with Donald Trump on October 6, Tayyip Erdoğan had abruptly rejected it, insisting on his own maximalist position. The official added that Erdoğan had not been given a "green light" for the operation, although it has to be added that Trump's announcement that U.S. forces would be withdrawn from the area had that effect. See Bethan, 2019.

<sup>157</sup> Siccardi, F. (2021). *How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Siccardi\\_-\\_Turkey\\_Syria-V3.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Siccardi_-_Turkey_Syria-V3.pdf); Buhari Gulmez, D. (2020). The resilience of the US–Turkey alliance: Divergent threat perceptions and worldviews. *Contemporary Politics*, 26(4), 475–492.

<sup>158</sup> In the area between the towns of Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn through what has often been branded as "a demographic engineering effort aimed at creating a pro-Turkish enclave under the direct control of the Ankara government". Özer, V. (2019, February 16). Güvenli bölge bizim kontrolümüzde olmalı. *Milliyet*. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/guvenli-bolge-bizim-kontrolumuzde-olmali-2828528>; Aydıntaşbaş, A. (2020). A New Gaza: Turkey's Border Policy in Northern Syria. *ECFR*.

<sup>159</sup> Referred to the parties that could split their territorial influence, meaning Russia, Turkey, and Iran. *Hürriyet*. (2019, October 9). *Erdoğan, Putin Discuss Possible Syria Operation*. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Erdoğan-putin-discuss-possible-syria-op-147317>; *Hürriyet*. (2019, October 10). *Russia Understands Turkey's Border Concerns, Says Russian FM*. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russia-understands-tur-keys-border-security-concerns-says-russian-fm-147353>.

<sup>160</sup> Interview

<sup>161</sup> Ataman, M. (2020). Turkish foreign policy during pandemic period. *Daily Sabah*; Haugom, 2019, 206.

own borders when there has been a crisis threatening its national unity and security.<sup>162</sup> In other words, Turkey “displayed a preference for a rational foreign policy established on its interests and opportunities in the regional arena rather than dependence on certain institutions or ruling elites fulfilling their domestic political agenda”<sup>163</sup> However, for more critical commentators, “the *modus operandi* has often appeared contradictory and erratic, and the results Ankara has achieved appear distant from the initial goals of 2011 and in tune just with a securitized approach [...], not a stabilizing one.”<sup>164</sup> What is certain is that the progressive estrangement from the US and the latter’s disengagement from the area became an opportunity for a tactical rapprochement with Russia and Iran, out of which emerged a new trend in TFP<sup>165</sup>: a sense of a greater degree of autonomy in the region and beyond, and a privileged place at the negotiating table as a mediator among opposition forces.<sup>166</sup>

#### 7.1.2.2. *Attempts of Strategic Autonomy*<sup>167</sup>

[the US has] to see Turkey in a new light, or else it is all over.<sup>168</sup>

This sentiment reflects Ankara’s growing feeling of abandonment after 2016, primarily marked by frustration over Western allies’ perceived inaction and the belief that Turkey’s national and security interests could only be pursued by a more “go-alone posture.” Overall, after the failed coup, TFP saw a significant change from a “zero problems with neighbors” stance to one characterized by increasing securitized practices and assertive behaviors. Undoubtedly, the external ground “evolved from restraining to threatening,” making Turkey more diplomatically isolated and facing security threats on different fronts.<sup>169</sup> Yet, Turkish leaders presented (or interpreted) the

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<sup>162</sup> Oğuzlu, 2016, 127

<sup>163</sup> Yilmaz, 2021, 146

<sup>164</sup> Interview. See also Çitlioğlu, E. (2020). *A Turkish Perspective on Syria*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28907>

<sup>165</sup> Siccardi, 2021, 7; Gulmez, 2020.

<sup>166</sup> Both in the northwestern province of Idlib, the border area between Afrin and Jarablus, and in the northeast, where it directly controls numerous armed opposition groups. Idem.

<sup>167</sup> The debate on the terms is quite intense. Autonomy-seeking has long been on the foreign policy agenda of states in the global South striving to reduce their dependence on hegemonic power structures. Juan Carlos Puig defines autonomy as “the maximum capacity of choice that one [state] can have, taking into account objective real-world constraints.” Pinheiro and Soares de Lima suggest that autonomy should not be conflated with sovereignty. The latter is “a country’s ability to make decisions based on its interest and needs” free of external interference within its territory; the former “implies overcoming the condition of dependency” in a hierarchical order. As Russell and Tokatlian argue, ‘autonomy is employed in the sense of a condition (one that is either diminished or lost), whereas sovereignty is understood in terms of international law (that is, mutual recognition and legal equality of states).’ All quoted in Öniş & Kutlay, 2021.

<sup>168</sup> Gülnur Aybet was working for the think tank SETA and then became advisor to the President.

<sup>169</sup> Donelli, 2020.

situation as one of “precious loneliness”<sup>170</sup> that could allow for greater flexibility in maneuvering through an evolving international and regional environment. Evocative in this sense was the publication “Turkey’s New Foreign Policy: A Quest for Autonomy” by the think-tank SETA close to the government, which helps to understand why and how Turkey began to claim to “be independent in its foreign policy and not ask permission from anyone else to launch operations aimed at strengthening its security.”<sup>171</sup> As Davutoğlu’s successor in the MFA, Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, articulated

Our neighboring regions and the global environment are experiencing a staggering change. The political, economic and technological transformations in the world are not superficial, but run deep and are permanent...The unipolarity that emerged after the Cold War did not last long...On global and regional levels, political and economic power struggles fuel crises and breed tension and turmoil in the system. Multilateralism is being pushed back...Due to Turkey’s geopolitical location, the ability to foresee and manage surrounding vulnerabilities, fragilities and crises is of vital importance...We are entering a period where we have to come up with new ideas, new initiatives and new moves.<sup>172</sup>

As underlined by Kardaş, the strategy involves concepts such as the effective use of military force beyond borders when needed, the possible disregard of traditional alliance relations, and taking unilateral action independent of the US and NATO.<sup>173</sup> In adopting these principles, Turkey displayed “a clear preference for short-term tactical gains over long-term strategic commitments, reflecting its reassessment of security threats and challenges amidst declining Western influence.”<sup>174</sup> Consequently, signaling an evident departure from its earlier approach, its actions led to a more securitized foreign policy, with hard power regaining prominence over soft power. This transformation was marked by a turn towards a militarized posture. It also reflected a strategic balancing act that, according to Turkish policymakers, could allow the leverage of ties with various global actors to maximize its autonomy and regional influence. As Altunışık noted, this dynamic constituted a “new Turkish game of balancing” within an increasingly multipolar international

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<sup>170</sup> Gardner, D. (2015, November 15). Turkey’s Foreign Policy of ‘Precious Loneliness’. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/69662b36-7752-11e5-a95a-27d368e1ddf7>; The term was taken also from a post on X by the former PM Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin, who stated: “It is wrong to claim ‘Turkey has been left alone in the Middle East.’ But if this was the criticism leveled, then I should say this is precious isolation. See *Hürriyet*. (2013, August 26). *Turkey not ‘lonely’ but dares to do so for its values and principles, says PM adviser*.”

<sup>171</sup> Ataman, M. (2019). Turkey’s New Foreign Policy: A Quest for Autonomy (Vol. 21). Insight Turkey.

<sup>172</sup> Çavuşoğlu, M. (n.d.). *Opening speech at 11th Ambassadors’ Conference*. Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/BAKAN/bkon2019-eng.pdf>

<sup>173</sup> Saban Kardaş quoted in Gurcan, M. (2016, November 4). Turkey’s new “Erdogan Doctrine.” *Al-Monitor*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/11/turkey-wants-use-its-hard-power-solve-regional-problems.html>.

<sup>174</sup> This was stated by many academicians and officials during interviews. This is also confirmed by reading pro-government voices: “After the changes in the global balance of power, the weakening of the American leadership, and the more assertive and competitive foreign policies of other global powers such as Russia and China, Turkey has decided to search for greater autonomy in its region. Furthermore, the Western states’ policies, especially those of the US, have forced Turkey to follow a more independent foreign policy in order to be able to counter the increasing political instability in its regions.” See Ataman, 2019, 4–5.



system.<sup>175</sup> On the one hand, the increasing use of military means has come together with an explicit doctrine of preemptive action.<sup>176</sup>

This attitude was accompanied by a shift from idealistic strategies like “strategic depth” to more pragmatic unilateral actions, which became known as the “Erdoğan doctrine.”<sup>177</sup> Recalling the 2002 G.W. Bush National Security Strategy, the core idea of this new security approach was that, against a wide range of external problems and threats, “instead of playing defense, Turkey will in the future take measures that can anticipate and prevent threats.”<sup>178</sup> On the other hand, the notion also had a normative-contestation layer encapsulated in the slogan “the world is bigger than five,” frequently invoked by Erdoğan. Originally elaborated to push for a reform of the UN Security Council’s composition, it soon expanded to the idea that “Turkey must avoid remaining anchored only to a Eurocentric global order.”<sup>179</sup> Similarly, Burhaneddin Duran, an academic who sits on the Security and Foreign Policy Council of the Presidency, has argued that although Turkey has recently aligned itself with Russia on many issues, “this does not prevent us from criticizing Moscow.”<sup>180</sup> For how far this was born from a precise “grand strategizing exercise,” it is undeniable that TFP entered a new phase after 2016. While it was anything new that Ankara continued to show a clear desire to carve out a leading role in other regional and extra-regional scenarios, the main changing feature was the more explicit use of aggressive rhetoric and a less predictable *modus operandi*.

Turkey’s involvement in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdish-dominated northern regions, is a crucial example of its evolving foreign policy. The fluctuating dynamics in Syria significantly influenced Turkey’s approach toward Iraq, with Ankara perceiving the Syrian conflict as a component of a broader struggle against Kurdish nationalist aspirations. For instance, Turkey’s alliance with the KRG was motivated by a desire to balance against Baghdad’s Shia-dominated central government and to maintain a foothold in Iraq’s oil-rich northern regions. However, after the Kurdish independence referendum in the north of Iraq in 2017, Turkey, alongside Iran, supported Baghdad’s

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<sup>175</sup> Altunışık, 2020.

<sup>176</sup> As Çavuşoğlu, articulated, “[w]e are following a preventive solution policy for regional and global problems on the ground because if we fail to solve them, the spillover effect of these problems will dramatically affect our domestic societies.” Çavuşoğlu, M. (2017). Turkish Foreign Policy in a Time of Perpetual Turmoil. *Insight Turkey*, 19(1), 15.

<sup>177</sup> Gurcan, 2020; Burhanettin Duran, “Turkey’s New Security Concept”, Daily Sabah, October 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2016/10/26/turkeys-new-security-concept> [accessed 23/9/2020].

<sup>178</sup> Duran, B. (2016, October 26). Turkey’s New Security Concept. *Daily Sabah*. [www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2016/10/26/turkeys-new-security-concept](http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2016/10/26/turkeys-new-security-concept).

<sup>179</sup> For the original speech, see Erdoğan, R. T. (2014, September 24). *Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan’s Speech at the UN General Assembly’s Plenary Meeting*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga11560.doc.html> See also a book, Erdoğan, R. T. (2017). “The World is Bigger than 5.” *The Vision of New Turkey*. Secretariat General of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey. For comments, see Aral, 2019; Also his circle reiterated the motto: Rakipoğlu, Z. (2019, March 3). Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sözcüsü Kalın: Dünya, Avrupa’dan ve ABD’den daha büyüktür. *Anadolu Ajansı*.

<sup>180</sup> Duran, B. (2020, February 11). The Sole Axis of Turkey’s Foreign Policy. *Daily Sabah*. <https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2020/02/11/the-sole-axis-of-turkeys-foreign-policy>.

central government's efforts to reassert control over disputed territories such as Kirkuk.<sup>181</sup> This triggered a convergence of interests between Turkey and Iran, with both opposing any Kurdish bid for statehood that could encourage similar movements within their national borders. While this alignment resulted in bilateral military cooperation, the sign of an increased militarized TFP came to light with Turkey's direct military actions. Operations like "Claw Eagle" and "Claw Tiger," launched in 2019 and 2020, involved large-scale airstrikes and ground operations targeting PKK strongholds in the Sinjar Mountains and other areas. At the same time, these unilateral interventions and enlarged military footprint in these zones further strained relations with Baghdad's authorities as the presence of Turkish troops in Bashiqa without the central government's consent was described by the Iraqi Parliament as a "hostile occupying force."<sup>182</sup> Overall, it demonstrated Turkey's pragmatic shift in "prioritizing its security concerns over its economic interests with the KRG, primarily when these interests diverged from Ankara's core objective of containing Kurdish autonomy."<sup>183</sup>

Turkey's relations with the Gulf countries were also evidence of the nature of its response to a growing regional isolation. While Ankara cultivated a strong military and economic partnership with Qatar<sup>184</sup>, it simultaneously found itself at odds with the Saudi-led bloc, particularly after the 2017 Gulf crisis. The economic blockade and the collective demands – including the closure of the Turkish military base – imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt pushed Turkey closer to Qatar, reinforcing their already emerging partnership. Ankara's support for Doha incorporated extending military support, logistics, and trade to mitigate the blockade's impact.<sup>185</sup> Moreover, Turkey's relations with Gulf countries became particularly strained due to divergent stances on the Muslim Brotherhood, which Riyadh and Abu Dhabi viewed as a terrorist organization.<sup>186</sup> The tensions were further exacerbated by Erdoğan's vocal criticism of Saudi Arabia following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.<sup>187</sup> Erdoğan's denouncement of Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman and the Kingdom's policies symbolized the deepening rift, which was amplified by the joint Saudi-U.S. funding of YPG militias

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<sup>181</sup> Park, B. (2019). Explaining Turkey's Reaction to the September 2017 Independence Referendum in the KRG: Final Divorce or Relationship Reset? *Ethnopolitics*, 18(1), 46–60.

<sup>182</sup> Kardaş, Ş. (2021). Turkey's Military Operations in Iraq: Context and Implications. *Middle East Policy*, 28(3-4), 133-143.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with an expert on Kurdish-related security dynamics.

<sup>184</sup> Evidenced, for instance, by the establishment of a Turkish military base in Doha in 2015. Başkan, B. (2019). Turkey between Qatar and Saudi Arabia: *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 16(62), 85–99.

<sup>185</sup> For an overview on Turkey- Qatar relations, see Başkan, B., & Pala, Ö. (2020). Making Sense of Turkey's Reaction to the Qatar Crisis. *The International Spectator*, 55(2), 65–78.

<sup>186</sup> Ayyash, A. (2020). The Turkish Future of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. *TCF*. <https://tcf.org/content/report/turkish-future-egypts-muslim-brotherhood>; Magued, S. (2018). The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's transnational advocacy in Turkey: A new means of political participation. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(3), 480–497.

<sup>187</sup> A Saudi journalist killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018. Cherkaoui, T., & Mohyidin, R. (2019). Murder in the Consulate: The Khashoggi Affair and the Turkish-Saudi War of Narratives. *The Political Economy of Communication*, 7(2), 28–59.

in northeastern Syria, a move that Ankara perceived as being directly against its national security interests.<sup>188</sup> In this sense, although the proximity between Turkey and Qatar had roots prior to 2017, this watershed was seized by both sides as an opportunity to take an extra and definitive step toward creating a concrete partnership. Undoubtedly, the most notable stride occurred in the area of military cooperation, which, in addition to the deployment of Turkish troops in the new territorial base, experienced exponential growth in the numbers of arms interchange as well as joint protocols and exercises in response to the Saudi-Emirati bloc. In addition, the vital role of aid from Turkey during the embargo has been reciprocated several times by Qatar through swap deals in the Turkish liras downturn and generous investments in strategic sectors.<sup>189</sup> Finally, an incremental alignment has also been evident in the regional affairs of the two countries, as the Turkish narrative – aimed at branding Saudi-led actions as “inhuman and un-Islamic”<sup>190</sup> – has explicitly emphasized the establishment of a new political-ideological axis directed at undermining the Saud leadership in the Sunni field by following a precise track: the proposal of a different kind of political Islam and countering the geopolitical goals of the Gulf bloc by supporting actors linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Hamas in Palestine or militias close to the Free Syrian Army (FSA).<sup>191</sup> The Arab Uprising first and the Gulf crisis later created an ideal environment for both actors to realize their political goals: security and sovereignty for Doha and the opportunity to maintain their regional and global political influence for Ankara.<sup>192</sup> Finally, the 2020 Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and several Gulf states, further complicated Turkey’s regional relations.<sup>193</sup> From the perspective of regional dynamics, they were seen as “the consecration of a dynamic already in place rather than a true turning point, with the formalization of an anti-Iranian and anti-Turkish front that relies on increasingly sophisticated weaponry and security systems.”<sup>194</sup> In the words of Galip Dalay, Turkey “perceived a bigger threat from the regional aspirations of the anti-Iran camp than from those of Iran.”<sup>195</sup> Finally, allusions to “yet another betrayal to the umma” and an “action dangerous to

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<sup>188</sup> Anadolu Ajansı. (2018, May 28). *Suudi Arabistan’dan YPG/PKK ile çalışan Arap güçlere destek*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/suudi-arabistandan-ypg-pkk-ile-calisan-arap-guclere-destek/1158870>.

<sup>189</sup> Battaloglu, N. H. (2021). Ideational Factors in Turkey’s Alignment with Qatar and Their Impact on Regional Security. *The International Spectator*, 56(4), 101–118.

<sup>190</sup> At the time, there was a popular campaign in Turkish media with the hashtag “#TurkeyWithQatar”. TRT. (n.d.). *Turkish Food Items Fill Up Empty Shelves in Qatari Stores*. <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/turkish-food-items-replace-gulf-imports-in-blockaded-qatar-376429>

<sup>191</sup> Yetim, M., & Telci, İ. N. (2023). Another “Third Way” to Narrate the Existing Alliances in the Middle East: Turkey-Qatar, Saudi Arabia-UAE, and Iran-Syria. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(3), 484–505.

<sup>192</sup> Aras & Pala, 2015.

<sup>193</sup> Feierstein, G. M., & Guzansky, Y. (2022). Two years on, what is the state of the Abraham Accords? *Middle East Institute*.

<sup>194</sup> Brignone, M. (2020). Abu Dhabi si congeda dalle cause panarabe. In nome di Abramo. *Fondazione Oasis*. <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/it/abu-dhabi-si-congeda-dalle-cause-panarabe-in-nome-di-abramo>.

<sup>195</sup> Dalay, G. (2021). Turkish-Iranian Relations Are Set to Become More Turbulent. *German Marshall Fund*. See also Sheiko, Y. (2018). The United Arab Emirates: Turkey’s new rival. *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/united-arab-emirates-turkeys-new-rival>.

regional stability” signaled Turkey’s willingness to shy away from accusations of sectarianism and broaden the appeal of its reactionary discourse to a broader portion of the Muslim world.<sup>196</sup> Nonetheless, although the AKP’s Islamist inclination was not entirely new, its use of increasingly explicit and recurrent rhetoric in the same direction became functional in legitimizing its projection across national borders. In this light, one can read Ankara’s criticism aimed at the Gulf countries concerning their alignment with Israel and acts aimed at undermining Saudi Arabia’s role as the guardian of Islam, both in a religious sense – as in the case of the conversion of Aya Sofya from museum to mosque<sup>197</sup> – and in terms of political legitimacy – as in the case of the promotion of the Kuala Lumpur Summit with Iran and other South East-Asian Islamic countries.<sup>198</sup>

Another area that marked a critical turning point in Turkey’s use of hard power and reliance on proxies to achieve its strategic goals was its military intervention in Libya in 2019 in support of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayez al-Sarraj. For many observers, Turkey “borrowed from the Russian playbook in Syria.”<sup>199</sup> First, it took on international law by asserting that a UN-recognized administration invited the intervention. Second, the campaign itself was kept within limits, similar to Russia’s assistance to Assad. Rather than put “boots on the ground,” Turkey relied on air power and proxy fighters. By January 2020, a reported 2,000 Syrians from the Ankara-supported and trained militias in Syria were deployed on the frontlines around Tripoli.<sup>200</sup> Private military contractors, such as the SADAT company<sup>201</sup>, were also in the field, just like their opposite from Russia, the Wagner company, fighting for Kalifa Haftar.<sup>202</sup> In addition, Turkey’s navy appeared close to Libya’s shores. In late March 2020, the BBC released images of cargo ships bringing in heavy weaponry – in violation of the UN-imposed embargo – to the government in Tripoli.<sup>203</sup> Yet nothing seems to have made a more tremendous difference than Bayraktar TB2, Turkey’s drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, UAV). By deploying drones, military

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<sup>196</sup>For a perspective from Israel, see Tsukerman, I. (2020). Turkey’s “Defense Line”: An Ideological Front. *BESA Center*. For a Turkish one from the government circles, see Ataman, M. (2020, August 19). UAE and Israel: Normalization or formalization? *Daily Sabah*.

<sup>197</sup> See the considerations of the then-Deputy FM, Kıran, Y. S. (2020). Hagia Sophia: Symbol of Peace and Diversity. *Insight Turkey*, 22(Summer 2020), 67–73.

<sup>198</sup> In 2019, Turkey, Iran, Malaysia, Qatar, Indonesia and Pakistan signed an 18-point manifesto, declared to be about “religious cooperation” but essentially tracing the idea of creating a parallel forum to the Gulf and OIC mechanisms. See <https://www.memri.org/reports/kuala-lumpur-summit-2019-bid-qatar-turkey-malaysia-iran-challenge-saudi-arabias-standing>.

<sup>199</sup> Bechev, 2022, 217. See also Cheterian, V. (2023). Friend and Foe: Russia–Turkey relations before and after the war in Ukraine. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 34(7), 1271–1294.

<sup>200</sup> They were said to have been offered a monthly salary of \$2,000 for the job, in addition to prospective Turkish citizenship. See McKernan, B., & Akoush, H. (2020, June 15). Exclusive: 200 Syrian Troops Deployed to Libya to Support Government. *The Guardian*.

<sup>201</sup> Next sections will further explore its role.

<sup>202</sup> Eşiyok, D. (2020, January 4). Turkish Military Contractor SADAT Has Always Been in Libya. *Ahval*.

<sup>203</sup> Kardaş, Ş. (2020). Turkey’s Libya policy: Militarization of regional policies and escalation dominance. *China International Strategy Review*, 2(2), 325–336.

advisors, and Syrian mercenaries,<sup>204</sup> Turkey shifted the balance of power in Libya, enabling the GNA to repel the assault by Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which the UAE, Egypt, France, and Russia backed. Multiple objectives drove Ankara's intervention: securing its influence in Libya, safeguarding economic interests, and supporting the GNA in establishing a maritime boundary agreement that expanded Turkey's claims in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>205</sup> Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu went on a victory lap in late June 2020, together with the Minister of Economy Berat Albayrak and the Intelligence head Hakan Fidan.<sup>206</sup> Setting up a base in al-Watiya and possibly a naval facility in Misrata was part of the agenda, as under the Gaddafi-era energy and infrastructure agreements. Ankara became the patron of the GNA, investing heavily in the reform of the armed forces and the interior ministry.<sup>207</sup> Despite forming a unity government in February 2021 with solid connections to Turkey and lowering tensions between Turkey and the UAE, a new proxy conflict was not to be ruled out. Still, Ankara secured its position – that endures at the moment of writing – as a top power broker in the North African country.<sup>208</sup>

As mentioned, the Libyan strategy was further connected to the disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean for energy resources.<sup>209</sup> Indeed, the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding between Turkey and the GNA on maritime boundaries further aggravated regional tensions. This agreement aimed to counterbalance the growing alignment among Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt, who sought to exclude Turkey from Eastern Mediterranean gas developments. In response, Turkey intensified its military presence in the region, conducting naval exercises, deploying warships, and sending drilling vessels into disputed waters, directly challenging Greek and Cypriot claims. These actions led to a deterioration in relations with the EU, and with especially France. The Turkish-Greek rivalry in the Eastern Mediterranean reached new heights in 2020 when Turkey sent the seismic research vessel *Oruç Reis* into contested waters, accompanied by a military escort.<sup>210</sup> Turkey's assertive stance, combined with its exclusion from the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, further underscored how its

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<sup>204</sup> Debre, I. (2020, July 17). Pentagon Report: Turkey Sent Up to 3,800 Fighters to Libya. *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/pentagon-report-turkey-sent-up-to-3800-fighters-to-libya/2020/07/17/0736c972-c86d-11ea-a825-8722004e4150\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/pentagon-report-turkey-sent-up-to-3800-fighters-to-libya/2020/07/17/0736c972-c86d-11ea-a825-8722004e4150_story.html).

<sup>205</sup> Still, in a gesture to Russia, Turkish Armed Forces allowed Wagner mercenaries to withdraw from the Tripoli area when the GNA moved the frontline to Sirte, the gateway to the eastern oilfields, and the Jufrah airbase, the LNA's operational hub in central Libya. Telci, I. N. (2020). Turkey's Libya Policy: Achievements and Challenges. *Insight Turkey*, 41–54.

<sup>206</sup> Idem.

<sup>207</sup> Megerisi, T. (2020). It's Turkey's Libya Now. *ECFR*.

<sup>208</sup> Kardaş, 2020.

<sup>209</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see Tziarras, 2022.

<sup>210</sup> This action provoked a strong response from Greece and Cyprus, leading to a military build-up in the region, with France also sending naval forces in support of Greece. Idem.

strategic ambitions to protect its energy interests and assert its sovereignty in the region exacerbated its diplomatic isolation.<sup>211</sup>

The “Libyan strategy” and the Turkish-Russian condominium were also replicated in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. Ankara’s decision to back Baku was motivated by historical, cultural, and geopolitical considerations, including a desire to counter Russian influence in the South Caucasus. Turkey provided Azerbaijan with drones, military advisors, and reportedly Syrian fighters, significantly tipping the balance in favor of Baku.<sup>212</sup> The conflict revealed Turkey’s intent to challenge Russian dominance in its near abroad, much like Russia had done in Syria. Despite a Kremlin-brokered ceasefire, Turkey managed to establish a military observation point in Nagorno-Karabakh, asserting itself as a critical stakeholder in the region’s security architecture. This involvement also resonated domestically, where nationalist fervor was stoked by images of Erdoğan alongside Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev during victory celebrations in Baku, reinforcing Turkey’s narrative of defending Turkic brotherhood and expanding its strategic reach.<sup>213</sup>

With different means and strategies, Turkey’s engagement in Africa reflects the efforts to diversify its foreign policy beyond traditional areas and project its influence across new frontiers. The opening of a military base in Somalia in 2017 marked the largest Turkish military installation outside its borders and underscored Ankara’s ambition to extend its reach in the Horn of Africa. This base followed years of humanitarian aid and development initiatives in Somalia, coordinated by Turkish state institutions and organizations aligned with the ruling AKP. Establishing a base in Sudan’s Suakin Island, leased in 2017 for 99 years, also illustrates Turkey’s maritime strategy to secure key locations in the Red Sea, expanding its influence over critical shipping lanes. In the process, Turkey has developed its own “string of pearls” across the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, as the analyst Michael Tanchum has put it.<sup>214</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey increased its diplomatic presence significantly, with the number of embassies rising from 12 in 2003 to 41 in 2018. This was complemented by expanded commercial ties and investments, with Turkish Airlines establishing routes to over 50 flight destinations across the continent. As articulated by Erdoğan, Turkey’s

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<sup>211</sup> Soler i Lecha, 2022; Adar, S., & Toygür, I. (2020). Turkey, the EU and the Eastern Mediterranean crisis: Militarization of foreign policy and power rivalry. *SWP Comment*.

<sup>212</sup> Kınık, H., & Çelik, S. (2021). The Role of Turkish Drones in Azerbaijan’s Increasing Military Effectiveness: An Assessment of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. *Insight Turkey*, 23(Fall 2021), 169–191; For a more skeptical view, Göksel, N. (2021). Turkey Recalibrates Its Hard Power. *International Crisis Group*.

<sup>213</sup> Yavuz, M. H., & Gunter, M. M. (2022). *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives* (1st ed.). Routledge.

<sup>214</sup> Tanchum, M. (2019). Turkey’s String of Pearls: Turkey’s Overseas Naval Installations Reconfigure the Security Architecture of Mediterranean–Red Sea Corridor. *AIES*.

narrative of an emerging “Ankara consensus” portrayed its engagement as a counterbalance to Western exploitation (“Washington consensus”), aiming to forge partnerships based on mutual benefit rather than neo-colonial domination (“Beijing consensus”).<sup>215</sup> This strategy frequently resonated with several African capitals, providing Ankara with new allies and access to emerging markets.<sup>216</sup> However, Turkey’s African policy was not void of setbacks. For instance, in Sudan, the overthrow in 2019 of the Omar al-Bashir government, which Ankara had supported, allowed Saudi Arabia and the UAE to sideline Turkey.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, Turkey’s African policy has recently undergone a significant reevaluation by academics, think tanks, and journalists. Once seen as an exemplar of soft power diplomacy from an emerging democracy, the policy is now viewed as evidence that authoritarian regimes that struggle to exercise soft power may opt instead for more forceful tactics. In this regard, since the mid-2010s, Turkey’s approach to Africa has become increasingly assertive, as the state has taken control of societal power resources and used them, along with traditional state power, to pressure African governments into meeting its foreign policy objectives. These objectives have sometimes been driven by Turkey’s regional conflicts with countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE (as in Sudan or in the Ethiopia-Eritrea strife), and at other times by domestic political struggles within Turkey itself (as in the case of the struggle against the Gülen movement’s presence in the continent).<sup>218</sup>

Similarly, since 2015, TFP in the Balkans has taken on a more nuanced and pragmatic approach characterized by deeper economic cooperation, political engagement, and regional partnerships. Moving beyond a focus on historical and cultural ties, as in the previous decades, Turkey has broadened its scope to engage with non-Muslim countries. An example of this shift is the growing relationship with Serbia. Under the leadership of President Erdoğan, Turkey has developed a strong partnership characterized by frequent high-level meetings and a significant increase in economic exchanges. Turkish companies have established multiple factories in Serbia, boosting local economies and fostering closer bilateral ties. Yet, this did not prevent Turkey from “putting its foot in another shoe when it sold its homemade Bayraktar drone to Serbia’s kryptonite [Kosovo].”<sup>219</sup> Therefore, while cultural diplomacy, such as the promotion of the Turkish language and the restoration of Ottoman-era heritage sites, continues to play an essential role, the country has

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<sup>215</sup> Donelli, F. (2018). The Ankara consensus: the significance of Turkey’s engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 30(1), 57-76.

<sup>216</sup> Donelli, F. (2021). Turkey in Africa: Turkey’s strategic involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa. I.B. Tauris.

<sup>217</sup> Tanchum, 2019; Donelli, F., & Gonzalez-Levaggi, A. (2021). Crossing Roads: The Middle East’s Security Engagement in the Horn of Africa. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 33(1), 45–60.

<sup>218</sup> Heibach, J., & Taş, H. (2024). Beyond the Soft–Hard Power Binary: Resource Control in Turkey’s Foreign Policy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 26(3), 311–326.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with an expert from the Western Balkans.

increasingly emphasized concrete economic projects and strategic alliances. However, this outreach was not without controversy due to Ankara's attempts to eliminate the influence of the Gülen movement in those countries. At the same time, Turkey's engagement in the Balkans has been shaped by its domestic political considerations, with Erdoğan using his relationships with regional leaders to bolster his image both at home and abroad. By building close ties with leaders like Serbia's Aleksandar Vučić and Albania's Edi Rama, Erdoğan strengthens his standing as an influential figure in regional but also in domestic politics.<sup>220</sup> Another aspect epitomized by Turkey's involvement in the Balkans is its stance as a country pursuing an independent foreign policy and its position between NATO, EU, Russia, and China's interest in the region. Despite occasionally strained relations with Western allies, Turkey has "generally – and at least rhetorically – favored a NATO enlargement, evidenced by its swift ratification of Montenegro and North Macedonia's accession treaties."<sup>221</sup> This support contrasts sharply with Russia's opposition to NATO's presence in the Balkans, underscoring its interest in maintaining a foothold in Euro-Atlantic security frameworks while simultaneously advancing its strategic interests in the Balkans. At the same time, TFP in the area has benefited from broader trends of de-Europeanization.<sup>222</sup> The EU's reluctance to advance the accession process for some Western Balkan countries has created a strategic vacuum that Turkey, Russia, and China have sought to fill. As Dimitar Bechev notes, "de-Europeanization in Turkey mirrors de-Europeanization in its Balkan neighborhood,"<sup>223</sup> reflecting shared frustrations with the EU's slow progress on enlargement and integration. Turkey's involvement, however, might be read as not aimed at directly countering the EU but rather capitalizing on opportunities created by the EU's hesitancy, engaging in parallel rather than adversarial policies.<sup>224</sup> Still, the Turkish-Russian *modus vivendi* exists also in the Balkans, in a way that

Turkey's strategy in the Balkans is not inherently revisionist or driven by a desire to roll back Western influence. Instead, Turkey maintains a nuanced stance, supporting NATO initiatives while also pursuing independent policies that occasionally converge with Russian interests, particularly in economic and energy domains.<sup>225</sup>

In this sense, the weakening of the EU as a normative force in both Turkey and the Balkans has allowed Ankara to position itself as an alternative partner, offering economic investments, cultural

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<sup>220</sup> Öztürk, 2021, 50.

<sup>221</sup> Interview.

<sup>222</sup> Günay, C., & Dzihic, V. (2016). Decoding the authoritarian code: Exercising 'legitimate' power politics through the ruling parties in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 529–549.

<sup>223</sup> Bechev, 2022b.

<sup>224</sup> Bieber, F., & Tzifakēs, N. (Eds.). (2020). *The Western Balkans in the world: Linkages and relations with non-western countries*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>225</sup> Interview.



outreach, and military cooperation that align with regional needs and aspirations.<sup>226</sup> Overall, Turkey's involvement in the area is thus driven by a "mixture of ideology and pragmatic calculations," reflecting a strategy that combines economic interests, political alliances, and security cooperation.<sup>227</sup> As a politician in the Western Balkans commented,

[Erdoğan's] strong connections with leaders like Vučić, Rama, Izetbegović and Dodik have certainly made it easier for Turkey to push forward investments [...however], these relationships haven't done much to ease ethnic tensions or reduce conflicts in the region. Right now, Turkish influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is largely tied to the interests of Erdoğan and the AKP. We see a range of actors – from Turkish politicians and diplomats to media outlets and religious organizations – pushing this agenda. But I think Turkey's economic leverage in Bosnia is set to decline. First, Turkey is dealing with a serious economic crisis of its own, and second, Bosnia just isn't a profitable market for investors. Many of the Turkish investors who initially came to Bosnia for emotional or political reasons have already shifted their focus to Serbia, where they find more support and better incentives. That creates a complicated dynamic [...] This approach has sparked resentment among Bosniaks, who feel betrayed when they see Turkey opening factories and making investments in Serbia while seemingly sidelining Bosnia.<sup>228</sup>

For what concerns EU-Turkey relations, the late 2010s marked the beginning of a noticeable downturn, characterized by a growing "enlargement fatigue" within the EU that prompted a specific "Turkey fatigue."<sup>229</sup> As one diplomat remarked,

This period saw a diminishing appetite within the EU for any substantial changes in the relationship, due in part to the lack of a viable alternative that would be acceptable to the Turkish government. [...] both the EU and Turkey were cautious about being perceived as the party responsible for any deterioration in relations, [...] leading them to maintain or even increase cooperation in certain areas despite rising tensions.<sup>230</sup>

Certainly, following the 2016 failed coup attempt, relations began to suffer significantly. First, it halted the already strained accession negotiations. Despite its non-binding nature, the European Parliament voted in 2016 to freeze membership talks when the Turkish government increased its repressive measures, reflecting the EU's growing criticism of authoritarianism and diminishing Turkish aspirations to meet EU membership criteria.<sup>231</sup> This decision was also influenced by broader domestic and regional developments, including the rise of populism within Europe, the 2015 refugee

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<sup>226</sup> Alpan & Öztürk, 2022.

<sup>227</sup> Huskić, A., & Fırat Büyük, H. (2022). Measuring Turkey's contemporary influence in Bosnia And Herzegovina: Myth and reality. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 22(1), 121–144.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with local politician in Western Balkans.

<sup>229</sup> Soler I Lecha, E., Tekin, F., & Sökmen, M. J. (2018). It Takes Two to Tango: Political Changes in Europe and their Impact on Turkey's EU Bid. *FEUTURE*, 17.

<sup>230</sup> Interview.

<sup>231</sup> Weise, H., & Tekin, F. (2022). German Narratives, Strategies and Scenarios of EU-Turkey Relations 2002–2018: Towards a Unique Partnership – Yet to be defined. In F. Tekin & A. Schönlaue (Eds.), *The EU-German-Turkish Triangle* (pp. 79–110). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.

crisis, and the ongoing Russian aggression in Crimea.<sup>232</sup> By 2017, the transactional nature of the EU-Turkey relationship had become more evident. Both sides increasingly focused on pragmatic cooperation driven by shared interests rather than normative alignment. The 2015 refugee agreement between Turkey and the EU was a clear example of this shift, where the EU sought to stem the flow of migrants, and Turkey sought financial and political benefits, such as visa-free travel for its citizens within the Schengen area and a resumption of EU accession talks. “[This agreement, [which] emphasized interests over values, indicated the increasing preference of both parties for a more transactional basis in their relationship.”<sup>233</sup> In 2018, the EU-Turkey relationship reached a turning point when the “General Affairs Council Conclusions” in June 2018 stated unequivocally that “Turkey has been moving further away from the European Union.” As a result, Turkey’s accession negotiations had effectively come to a standstill. No further chapters were to be opened or closed, and no progress was foreseen regarding the modernization of the EU-Turkey Customs Union.<sup>234</sup> This formal acknowledgment by the EU confirmed that Brussels had little expectation of Turkey’s alignment with its values and criteria for membership. The rhetoric of the EU grew harsher, and the emphasis on cooperation increasingly focused on areas of mutual interest, such as trade, migration, and energy, rather than on political alignment or democratic reforms. Relations deteriorated further in 2019, particularly in response to Turkey’s drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>235</sup> In July 2019, EU ministers decided to downgrade relations with Turkey, endorsing the European Commission’s proposal to reduce pre-accession assistance.<sup>236</sup> Moreover, as noted by Soler Soler I Lecha this relations “takes two to tango”<sup>237</sup>, In other words, the actions or inactions of successive Turkish governments explain only partially the variations in EU-Turkey relations, and therefore, an analysis of change in these relations must also contemplate the changes in the policies of the EU and its member states toward Turkey.<sup>238</sup> For instance, the rise of right-wing populism both in Turkey and in key European countries has led to a vicious circle whereby populists in both contexts have benefited

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<sup>232</sup> Smith, M. H., & Youngs, R. (2018). The EU and the Global Order: Contingent Liberalism. *The International Spectator*, 53(1), 45–56.

<sup>233</sup> Interview.

<sup>234</sup> Ülgen, S. (2017, December). Trade as Turkey’s EU Anchor. *Carnegie Europe*; Nas, Ç. (2018). Turkey-EU Customs Union. *Insight Turkey*, 20(3), 43–60. Yet, many in pro-EU circles did not express much enthusiasm for it, and some analysts argued that it could even damage relations, transforming “a cooperation opportunity into a bargaining matter”. See, for instance, Özgehan, S., & Nas, Ç. (2016). A Deal to End “the” Deal: Why the Refugee Agreement is a Threat to Turkey-EU Relations. *German Marshall Fund of the United States*. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/deal-enddeal-why-refugee-agreement-threat-turkey-eu-relations>.

<sup>235</sup> Council of the EU. (2019, November 12). Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1894 of 11 November 2019 concerning restrictive measures in view of Turkey’s unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019D1894>.

<sup>236</sup> Later that year, in November, the Council adopted a framework for restrictive measures that could target individuals and entities involved in what the EU deemed “illegal drilling for hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean.” These measures indicated the increasingly contentious and punitive approach the EU was beginning to adopt toward Turkey, reflecting a shift from constructive engagement to conflict management. *Idem*.

<sup>237</sup> Soler I Lecha et al., 2022.

<sup>238</sup> Soler I Lecha, 2023, 22.

from each other's existence but have clearly undermined Turkey's long-term membership prospects. On the one hand, many European leaders began to see Turkey not as a natural insider sharing a common European identity but "as an important outsider – a privileged partner – in terms of joint economic and security interests but not a potential EU member."<sup>239</sup> On the other hand, this served the populist traits of the Turkish government, who could juxtapose Turkey's image as a humanitarian actor in opposition to European's deficiencies.

Within this context, by early 2020, the relationship was characterized by heightened volatility and conflictual cooperation. Despite significant disagreements, both sides continued to seek areas where collaboration could be preserved or enhanced. This period saw the European Commission attempting to revive the "positive agenda" by proposing areas of cooperation that could allow for a progressive, proportionate, and reversible approach to EU-Turkey relations. In March 2021, the European Commission released a communication acknowledging Turkey's "calmer, more constructive attitude on various issues," suggesting potential areas of cooperation while also emphasizing the points of contention. Several factors inhibited a more drastic deterioration in EU-Turkey relations despite these escalating tensions. Strong economic and security interdependencies between Turkey and the EU would make a complete break costly for both parties. Additionally, neither side could propose a viable alternative to the current accession process, leading to the preservation of the status quo. Both Turkey and the EU faced vulnerabilities that discouraged a complete severance of ties. For example, the EU was dealing with multiple crises, such as the Syrian refugee crisis, which highlighted its dependence on Turkish cooperation. Similarly, Turkey's economic challenges, exacerbated by the pandemic, also encouraged a pragmatic approach. Overall, the EU-Turkey relationship had settled into a pattern of fluctuating tensions and temporary de-escalations, reflecting both the adversarial and cooperative elements in their interactions. While periods of conflict were punctuated by attempts at reconciliation, as seen with Turkey's desire to "turn the page" in 2021, the underlying tensions and competing interests continued to define the bilateral relationship.

Similar dynamics occurred in Turkey-US relations. The passage from the late Trump administration to Biden's Presidency did not undergo a significant shift but continued along a path marked by a largely transactional nature. By the end of Trump's Presidency, initially welcomed by Ankara due to Trump's pragmatic and transactional approach, Turkey sought to maintain its strategy

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<sup>239</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, 1097.

of balancing relations between Washington and Moscow to sustain and broaden its influence across several regions. Indeed, during Trump's tenure,

Erdoğan found an American leader less concerned with democratic norms and human rights, making it easier for the Turkish government to negotiate on a transactional basis. Despite moments of tension, [such as Trump's] threats to "destroy" the Turkish economy through sanctions, both leaders maintained a pragmatic relationship...[as] Erdoğan often suggested to the public that Trump had been "misinformed" by his advisors whenever tensions arose.<sup>240</sup>

When Biden assumed office, there was an expectation of a potential shift due to his more critical stance on human rights and democracy. However, this did not lead to any radical change in Ankara. Instead, Turkey continued to "play Washington like a fiddle."<sup>241</sup> For example, it continued to leverage its strategic positioning within NATO while pursuing independent policies, such as its controversial purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system. Despite US concerns, Turkey attempted various compromises, including proposals to keep the S-400s separate from NATO infrastructure or not to activate them. These efforts indicated Turkey's intent to maintain a balance between its relationships with both Russia and the US rather than aligning fully with one side. As such, the Biden administration faced a complex situation in dealing with Turkey. While the US President emphasized democracy and human rights more than his predecessor, he had to balance these concerns with strategic interests, particularly Turkey's role in containing Russian expansionism. Exploiting such areas of interest, Erdoğan argued that Turkey was the only NATO member willing and capable of countering Moscow's ambitions, presenting Turkey as an indispensable partner.<sup>242</sup> Ultimately, the relationship between Turkey and the US under Biden has remained transactional, driven by pragmatic considerations rather than alignment on values or a shared strategic vision. As Secretary of State Antony Blinken remarked during his confirmation hearing in January 2021, Turkey remains a "so-called strategic partner,"<sup>243</sup> a description that reflects the complexities and contradictions inherent in the relationship. Both countries continue to engage with each other based on converging interests, particularly in areas such as security and regional stability, but with no significant departure from the transactional nature that characterized their relations during the Trump administration. In conclusion, while there were expectations of changes in Turkey-US relations with the transition from Trump to Biden, the reality has been marked by continuity rather than change. Turkey continues to prioritize its independent strategic goals, leveraging its position between the US and Russia to maximize its influence, particularly in regions like the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans. The bilateral

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<sup>240</sup> Interview.

<sup>241</sup> Cook, S. A. (2019). Erdoğan Plays Washington Like a Fiddle. *Council for Foreign Relations*.

<sup>242</sup> Ülgen, S. (2021). Redefining the U.S.-Turkey Relationship. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

<sup>243</sup> Pamuk, H., & Muhammed, A. (2021, January 20). U.S. Secretary of State Nominee Blinken Says Turkey Not Acting Like an Ally. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-bidenstate-turkey-idUSKBN29O2OM>.

relationship remains one of pragmatism and calculated reciprocity, reflecting Turkey's broader foreign policy orientation toward sustaining autonomy and influence in an increasingly complex global order.<sup>244</sup> Overall, it is here useful to recall Gülmez double-faceted explanation about the disjunctions in US-Turkish relations. One is the result of divergent threat perceptions. The other is the result of divergent world views. In this sense, the AKP government's push for "strategic autonomy" creates a security dilemma for Turkey. In balancing its dealings with the US, Russia and Iran, Ankara is caught between a "fear of abandonment" due to NATO/US decline to protect Turkey against an aggressive Russia and Iran, and a "fear of entrapment" due to NATO/US potential to trigger a war against Russia and Iran that would impact Turkey, a frontline state. Underscoring the dilemma is Turkey's distrust of the West and the decline in the credibility of the US/NATO alliance. For Gulmez, the "resilience" of the US/NATO alliance can be attributed to an admixture of the "transactional" concern that Turkey needs the US as a hedge against Russia and Iran and the "ontological" benefit that Turkey obtains from legitimating its status as a rising middle power straddling between East and West."<sup>245</sup>

Within this context, Russia-Turkey relations represent a litmus test of TFP trends and prospects. Undoubtedly, since TFP embarked on a more assertive stance, Ankara and Moscow have emerged as geopolitical rivals and partners in ongoing conflicts across different regions. As both countries simultaneously act as competitors, and at times, outright adversaries, while also collaborating as partners, the complex nature of their relationship has been described in the media as that of "frenemies,"<sup>246</sup> "co-opetition"<sup>247</sup> or "conflictual cooperation."<sup>248</sup> Telling of this complicated relationship is Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's articulation: "Turkey has never been considered our strategic ally. It is a partner, a very close partner, and in many sectors, this partnership is of a strategic nature."<sup>249</sup> This relationship blends elements of conflict and cooperation, managing tensions across various contexts and periods, transforming it into a sustained, long-term trend. A comparative analysis of conflicts in their common areas of interest reveals a consistent pattern: although Russia and Turkey remain strategic rivals – especially given Turkey's membership in NATO, Russia's declared military adversary – they have maintained collaboration over an extended

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<sup>244</sup> Martin, L. (2022). Constructing a realistic explanation of Turkish – US relations. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 776.

<sup>245</sup> Gulmez, 2020.

<sup>246</sup> Nuray. (2016, December 16). Turkey-Russia: New 'Frenemies? *Hürriyet*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/nuray-mert/turkey-russia-new-frenemies-107708>.

<sup>247</sup> Tashjian, Y. (2023). The Russian-Turkish 'Co-opetition' in Times of Regional Crisis. *AUB*. [https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/programs/arab\\_and\\_international\\_affairs/Publications/20212022/20220323\\_Yeghia\\_russia\\_turkey\\_en.pdf](https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/programs/arab_and_international_affairs/Publications/20212022/20220323_Yeghia_russia_turkey_en.pdf).

<sup>248</sup> Isachenko, D. (2021). Turkey and Russia: The logic of conflictual cooperation. *SWP Research Paper*.

<sup>249</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2020, October 14). *Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview*. [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4381977](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4381977).

period and across diverse situations. Even when Russia and Turkey found themselves on opposite sides of these conflicts, engaging in what could be seen as proxy wars or direct military confrontations, they managed to foster ongoing cooperation and conflict management.<sup>250</sup> This is because their interactions go beyond mere tactical coordination between two geopolitical competitors; they have created new opportunities, political spaces, and processes to advance their priorities and maximize their influence, often at the expense of other international and local actors. This collaboration has not only reduced Western influence in these regions but has also increasingly constrained the political autonomy of their local allies, turning them into more subordinate partners, as in the case of Libya, Syria, and Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>251</sup> Similarly, an ex-post evaluation of Turkey's purchase of the S-400 defense system might reveal how its assertive rhetoric on autonomy has "paradoxically resulted result in a dual dependency."<sup>252</sup> Firstly, it has made Turkey more vulnerable to Russia, as the deal does not include any technology transfer. This means that Russia, as the producer, retains control over the system and could potentially manipulate or even prevent its use. More concerning, this purchase has increased Turkey's reliance on NATO assurances, especially since the defense system has remained unused and stored in a hangar in Ankara. This situation underscores that the S-400 deal represents "conjunctural cooperation" rather than "strategic cooperation."<sup>253</sup> On the one hand, the AKP elites succeeded in using the deal to secure Turkey's role as a guarantor in the Russian-led Astana process and keep channels of communication with Moscow open in difficult contexts like Ukraine. On the other hand, this has exacerbated the already strained Turkey-NATO relations. While leaving NATO would be too costly for Turkey, these dynamics have added another layer of complexity to the mutual distrust that placed Turkey in the category of an "outlier member" within NATO. As a result, Turkey is seen as being "excluded from within NATO," marginalizing its position within the alliance. The country has invested around \$4 billion in the F-35 project and the S-400 missiles, but these investments have not fulfilled its self-defense objectives. Instead of establishing a sustainable strategic direction for Turkey, the S-400 issue has further complicated its geopolitical stance, leaving it "in a state of uncertainty, where it is neither here nor there."<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Cheterian, 2023, 2.

<sup>251</sup> Idem.

<sup>252</sup> Adisonmez & Oztig, 2024, 15.

<sup>253</sup> Yegin, 2019.

<sup>254</sup> In other terms, Turkey's intense emotional experience with the S-400 case stems from its impulsive actions, which significantly challenged its existing alliances. At the same time, these actions "sustain and supplement the official rules and regulations of [an international] community," as Turkey attempts to assert its presence through disruptive behavior, deriving a sense of satisfaction – or "*jouissance*" – from it. Adisonmez & Oztig, 2024, 15.

Other than the S-400 conundrum, the energy sector illustrates a similar mix of tension, competition, partnership, and collaboration., the two countries have remained interdependent in energy matters: Russia relies on Turkey for its energy exports, while Turkey depends on Russian natural gas. In a gesture aimed at reconciliation, Turkey made substantial financial concessions, such as granting tax breaks of \$8-9 billion for the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant by the Russian company Rosatom.<sup>255</sup> Additionally, in October 2016, both countries signed an agreement for the Turk Stream pipeline, which crosses the Black Sea to transport Russian natural gas to Turkey and further into Europe. This project, completed in January 2020, began to supply gas to Bulgaria and North Macedonia, replacing an older pipeline that ran through Ukraine. Finally, despite the increased polarization the invasion of Ukraine has brought to international relations, this partnership has endured on the similar precedent pattern.<sup>256</sup>

“Even if not on the scale of Russia at this juncture,” China is increasingly becoming an important actor for Turkey.<sup>257</sup> Since 2010, the Grand National Assembly has passed 13 China-related laws in the domains of energy, trade, infrastructure, health, logistics, technology and culture.<sup>258</sup> The growing relationship between Ankara and Beijing underscores the importance of two main elements. The first concerns the growing global reach of China in recent years under the Presidency of Xi Jinping, with major initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and large-scale lending from the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). The second element concerns Turkey’s increasing distancing away from the West and looking for alternative finance and diplomatic support to strengthen and consolidate the nascent presidential regime. The relationship with China also gathered significant momentum following the failed coup attempt of July 2016, with Turkey becoming increasingly involved in the BRI. In 2018, Turkey was invited to the BRICS conference in Johannesburg as the representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Erdogan showed enthusiasm about Turkey’s invitation as a “potential BRICS” member. Following the 2018 currency crisis in Turkey, in line with the desire to avoid the IMF at all costs as a symbol of Western dominance, Erdogan visited China, seeking financial support in the short term and expanding economic links in the long term.<sup>259</sup> In addition, in 2019, Turkey announced the “Asia Anew” initiative, designed to exploit new political and economic opportunities in the non-western world within a multipolar international order. However, this underscores some risks for Turkey. One is of a

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<sup>255</sup> Doğan, Z. (2016, August 15). Putin Gets Big Kiss-And-Make-Up Gift from Erdoğan. *Al-Monitor*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/turkey-russia-nuclear-plant-special-status.html>.

<sup>256</sup> This will be analyzed in the last section.

<sup>257</sup> Öniş, Z. (2023). Historic missed opportunities and prospects for renewal: Turkey-EU relations in a post-Western order. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 704.

<sup>258</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, 096.

<sup>259</sup> Öniş & Kutlay, 2020.

political nature, as underscored by the fact that expanding economic relations with China has become a priority, and as a result, human rights concerns about a historical issue like the Chinese Uyghur minority have been effectively delegated into the background.<sup>260</sup> A second question is related to the rise of Chinese style “authoritarian capitalism,” aided by its partnership by a like-minded global power and aimed at creating an alternative model to Western-style democratic capitalism(s),<sup>261</sup> which often provides an opportunity to consolidate their domestic authoritarian regimes. However, from an economic point of view, the fact that “the relationship is asymmetric, and Chinese gains are higher than the Turkish ones”<sup>262</sup> appear – up to date – to have prevented the elaboration of a clear strategic partnership.<sup>263</sup>

To conclude, strategic autonomy, in this context, has become a “byword for the step-by-step institutionalization of a transactionalist turn” in the way Turkey interacts with other relevant international actors. For what concerns Turkey’s relations with its traditional Western partner's partnership, despite the unfavorable trends, functional cooperation seem to be the evolution where “the bond between the parts is kept alive the complex economic and strategic interdependence.”<sup>264</sup> Nevertheless, while Turkey’s normative and tactical drift away from the western alliance allowed it to cultivate “alternative partnerships,” transactionalism leaves Ankara exposed to the influence from Russia and China.<sup>265</sup>

### **7.1.3. External Projection Parameters: Less Economic Power, More Military Industry**

The critical junctures examined above, their impact on prompting a more active TFP since the early 2000s, and their ultimate reflections on Turkey’s assertive “quest for strategic autonomy” are perhaps epitomized by the discussions about Turkey as a rising/middle power with reference to its growing military industry.<sup>266</sup> While taxonomic discussions on the issue are not the concern of this section, it is worth considering two aspects that exemplify how and why such a debate has evolved but never terminated throughout the last two decades. On the one hand, Turkey’s promising economic growth favored its image of a rising trading state and a benign/humanitarian power until the early

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<sup>260</sup> Öniş, Z., & Yalikul, M. (2021). Emerging partnership in a post-Western world? The political economy of China-Turkey relations. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(4), 522.

<sup>261</sup> Idem.

<sup>262</sup> Özşahin et al., 2022, 15.

<sup>263</sup> For more details, see Güneylüoğlu, M. (2022). The Turkey-China rapprochement in the context of the BRI: A geoeconomic perspective. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 76(5), 546–574.

<sup>264</sup> Interview with a Turkey official involved in EU affairs.

<sup>265</sup> Kutaly & Öniş, 2021, 1099.

<sup>266</sup> See Chapter 1.



2010s. On the other hand, the following reset of TFP towards a more aggressive and militaristic stance in the last decade and the downsides of its economic (in)stability since 2018 have intermingled with divergent opinions about the ultimate “rise” of its military industry.<sup>267</sup> While most of the accounts traditionally assessed such phenomenon through purely realist lenses (with power and material capabilities as the main parameters), the inclusion of socioeconomic, political, and ideational elements provides a more comprehensive explanation.<sup>268</sup>

As seen in the precedent chapters, from the 1974 Cyprus intervention to its more recent cross-border operations in Syria, the pursuit of a more independent international stance is

anything new in Turkey’s history: [...] whenever distance [of views] with the West increased, Turkey looked for alternative strategic ways, which also means having to rely less on just a *bunch* of states for security procurement.<sup>269</sup>

In other words, the level of strategic autonomy has been closely tied to Turkey’s reliance on Western military support. As this dependency has lessened, Turkey has increasingly adopted an independent foreign policy aligned with its own interests. The emphasis on self-sufficiency and technological independence was also a response to international sanctions and embargoes, which have historically constrained Turkey’s defense capabilities.<sup>270</sup> According to some US observers, this was

born of frustration, in a sense. Having purchased from Israel drones with limited capability, Turkey was rebuffed in efforts to purchase more advanced American drones. The US offered to share drone video, for instance, pointing at the PKK, but without targeting data and with a time delay. Turkey then tried the Israeli Heron, with similarly disappointing results.<sup>271</sup>

As Mehmetcik and Çelik put it, Turkey’s approach to maintaining strategic autonomy has always been strongly linked to its capacity for domestic military production. This perspective on autonomy is rooted in a preference for locally produced or non-Western-sourced defense equipment, which supports independence in both foreign policy decision-making and execution.<sup>272</sup> Conversely, as Turkey builds its military capabilities through domestic production, it enhances its autonomy in implementing its foreign policy.<sup>273</sup> However, since the development of a real military-industrial complex requires solid material capabilities, such a process could not take off until the 2000s.<sup>274</sup> “We

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<sup>267</sup> See for example, Hoffmann, 2019; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022; Tansel, 2020.

<sup>268</sup> Ciftci, S. (2023). Military might: A domestic economy explanation of Turkish foreign policy. *Turkish Studies*, 24(5), 764–787.

<sup>269</sup> Interview.

<sup>270</sup> Pierini, M., & Siccardi, F. (2021). Why the EU and the United States Should Rethink Their Turkey Policies in 2021. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

<sup>271</sup> Çağaptay, S., & Outzen, R. (2022). *The New Era of Turkish Foreign Policy*. 5(4), 3.

<sup>272</sup> On the topic, see Kurç, C. (2021). Between Defence Autarky and Dependency: The Dynamics of Turkish Defence Industrialization. In Ç. Kurç, R. Bitzinger, & S. G. Neuman (Eds.), *Defence industries in the 21st century: A comparative analysis*. Routledge.

<sup>273</sup> Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, 32.

<sup>274</sup> Kutlay, M. (2011). Economy as the ‘Practical Hand’ of ‘New Turkish Foreign Policy’: A Political Economy Explanation. *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), 67–88.

will continue to increase our investments in the defence industry until we completely free our country from foreign dependence,” Erdoğan stated in 2021.<sup>275</sup> For many, the cornerstone for expansion was the 2015 approval for a long-term base in Qatar, enabling the growth of what would become a “modular and” complex adaptive system” of basing and power projection across nearly a dozen countries.<sup>276</sup> The maritime component of forward basing has been compared to China’s “string of pearls,” a series of ports and bases designed to enable access and operations beyond its own littorals.<sup>277</sup> Over the past two decades, Turkey’s defense and aerospace industry has experienced a dramatic expansion, with overall sales increasing tenfold and exports growing by nearly 1,200%, according to 2022 data. In 2002, the sector’s total sales were approximately \$1 billion, and exports were around \$248 million. By 2021, these figures had surged to \$10.1 billion in sales and \$3.2 billion in exports, surpassing \$2.6 billion in imports. In the same year, Turkish companies secured new orders valued at \$8.5 billion, while the industry employed 75,000 people and invested \$1.6 billion in research and development. Official statistics revealed that in the first half of 2022, Turkey’s defense and aerospace exports reached a record high of nearly \$2 billion, reflecting a 48% increase from the same period in 2021. Still, Turkey’s influence on the international stage is complex and involves multiple layers, with its emphasis on hard power being just one recent development.<sup>278</sup>

In this sense, while the roots of Turkey’s military-industrial complex can be traced back several decades, its significant growth occurred under the AKP.<sup>279</sup> A combination of institutional reforms, public-private partnerships, and state-led capitalism has fueled the sector’s development. The transformation of Turkey’s defense industry between 2002 and 2022 reflects a broader economic and political strategy to enhance national security, reduce dependence on foreign arms, and assert Turkey’s role as a regional power. First, this evolutionary phase is closely linked to institutional reforms that have redefined the country’s defense policy framework. In 2004, the Turkish Presidency of Defense Industries, the state agency responsible for defense procurement, opened substantial tenders to the private sector for the first time, aiming to increase domestic production capabilities.

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<sup>275</sup> Duz, Z. N. (2021, July 8). Turkish President vows to end dependence on foreign defense goods. *Anadolu Ajansı*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-President-vows-to-end-dependence-on-foreign-defense-goods/2298545>.

<sup>276</sup> Outzen, R. (2021). *Deals, Drones, and National Will*. 108, 7.; Donelli, F. (2023). From Humanitarianism to Drones: The Pragmatic Flexibility of Turkey’s Policy Toward Sub-saharan Africa. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

<sup>277</sup> Tanchum, 2019.

<sup>278</sup> Statistics retrieved from: Markus Bayer, Global Militarisation Index 2021 (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies, 2021), <https://bicc.de/Publications/Report/Global-Militarisation-Index-2021/13496>. Bekdil, B. (2023, January 9). Turkish Defense Exports Pass \$4 Billion in 2022, Says Procurement Boss. *Defense News*. <https://www.defensenews.com/industry/2022/12/30/turkish-defense-exports-pass-4-billion-in-2022-says-procurement-boss/>; SIPRI. (n.d.). *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>; Hacıoğlu, S. (2029, March 6). Mapping the Turkish Military’s Expanding Footprint: Quick Take. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-07/mapping-the-turkish-military-sexpanding-footprint-quicktake#xi4y7vzkg>; Akça, I., & Özden, B. A. (2021). A Political-Economic Map of The Turkish Defense Industry. *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*.

<sup>279</sup> Adar, S. (2020). Understanding Turkey’s Increasingly Militaristic Foreign Policy. *APSA MENA*, 3(1).

This move was driven by both internal and external factors, such as domestic security concerns related to the PKK and a history of foreign sanctions. After [Turkey's military intervention in northern] Cyprus in 1974, the U.S. and European countries imposed strict limits on arms exports to Türkiye, followed by further sanctions over the years, albeit on a smaller scale. The situation escalated after Turkey's 2019 military operation in northeastern Syria, prompting NATO allies to impose new restrictions on arms exports to Ankara. In 2020, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Turkey [its defense procurement agency under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, CAATS]. It was expelled from the F-35 fighter jet program due to Turkey's 2017 purchase of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia.<sup>280</sup>

Another critical turning point was the restructuring of the Undersecretariat of Defense Industries (SAGEB), which, in 2017, was placed under the direct authority of the President's office and renamed the Presidency of Defense Industries (SSB).<sup>281</sup> This move marked a shift toward greater centralized control over defense procurement and strategy, aligning it with national security priorities. The primary objective of this restructuring was to position Turkey as a competitive actor in global defense markets, reduce reliance on foreign suppliers, and enhance domestic capabilities.<sup>282</sup> The SSB became a central institution in coordinating public and private sector efforts to develop indigenous defense technologies. Under the Presidency, defense procurement decisions became streamlined, and a closer alignment was established between government policies and private sector initiatives.<sup>283</sup> This is linked to a second aspect: state-led capitalism has been a defining feature of Turkey's defense industry development, characterized by strong state intervention, strategic use of public resources, and a close relationship between government institutions and selected private enterprises.<sup>284</sup> This alignment was achieved through preferential treatment for companies with strong ties to the ruling elite, such as BMC owned by Ethem Sancak<sup>285</sup>, and Baykar, controlled by the family of President Erdoğan's son-in-law.<sup>286</sup> In this sense, the concentration of power within the Presidency allowed for rapid decision-making and reduced bureaucratic hurdles, which in turn facilitated the growth of a domestic defense sector capable of competing internationally. Public-private partnerships reminiscent of a developmental state model have been central to this growth, as state intervention directed economic

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<sup>280</sup> Additionally, in the same year, Canada banned the use of its electro-optical and targeting sensor systems on the TB2 drones, following Turkey's supply of these drones to Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Conversation with an expert. See also International Crisis Group. (2020). *Türkiye's Growing Drone Exports*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkiye/turkiyes-growing-drone-exports>.

<sup>281</sup> Ciftci, 2023, 10.

<sup>282</sup> Demir, 2020, 5.

<sup>283</sup> Bekdil, B. (2019, April 18). Export Potential: Turkey's Homemade Drones Could Boost Local Industry'. *Defense News*. <https://www.defencenews.com/unmanned/2019/04/22/export-potential-turkeys-homemade-drones-could-boost-local-industry/>.

<sup>284</sup> Ciftci, 2023, 10. For an overview on the topic beyond the defense industry, see Buğra, A., & Savaşkan, O. (2014). *New capitalism in Turkey: The relationship between politics, religion and business*. Edward Elgar.

<sup>285</sup> He is a Turkish businessman considered to have "close ties to President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan." BBC Türkçe. (2022). *Ethem Sancak, kesin ihraç talebiyle AKP İstanbul İl Disiplin Kurulu'na sevk edildi*. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-60957226>.

<sup>286</sup> Ciftci, 2023, 10.

activity toward strategic sectors like defense.<sup>287</sup> Özal's legacy and the AKP government's emphasis on creating a national bourgeoisie, particularly one aligned with its political agenda, has been crucial in this context because "this new class of business elites has been instrumental in the geographic spread and growth of the national defense industry, with big defense companies now connected to hundreds of local sub-components suppliers."<sup>288</sup> The local SME suppliers are organized under clusters such as the Ankara-based Teknokent Defense Industry Cluster (TSSK), the Ostim Defense and Aviation Cluster (OSSA), and the Istanbul-based Turkish Defense and Industry Cluster (SAHA), led by Haluk Bayraktar.<sup>289</sup> ASELSAN, a major player in Turkey's defense sector, increased its rate of domestic supply for subcomponents from 38% in 2008 to 70% by 2020, reflecting the success of Turkey's localization efforts.<sup>290</sup> This strategic push towards localization aimed to reduce Turkey's dependence on foreign suppliers and enhance its ability to produce key military technologies independently. The country has developed a range of military equipment across different domains. Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) has been at the forefront of developing aerial platforms, including the T129 ATAK attack helicopter, the Anka and Aksungur drones, and the Hürjet, a domestically produced advanced trainer and light attack aircraft. In February 2024, Turkey's indigenous stealth combat aircraft, Kaan, conducted its maiden flight. Turkey's maritime capabilities have also expanded significantly, exemplified by the MILGEM project, which produced the Ada-class corvettes exported to countries like Pakistan.<sup>291</sup> The construction of Turkey's first aircraft carrier, the TCG Anadolu, represents another milestone in its efforts to project naval power beyond regional waters.<sup>292</sup> Additionally, Turkey has developed a range of tactical armored vehicles, such as the Yoruk and Ejder Yalcin, manufactured by Nurol Makina, which have been sold to numerous countries, including Hungary and Malaysia.<sup>293</sup>

Despite these diverse products, drones (UAV) have been central to Turkey's defense strategy. While the militarization of its foreign policy dramatically increased the country's involvement in several conflict areas simultaneously, it has also enhanced its global reputation as a key player in the defense industry. Turkish drones, particularly the Bayraktar TB2, have been deployed in multiple conflicts, demonstrating their effectiveness and solidifying Turkey's status as a military actor. In Libya, Turkish UAVs played a crucial role in neutralizing enemy defenses, and shifted the balance

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<sup>287</sup> Idem.

<sup>288</sup> Interview.

<sup>289</sup> Ciftci, 2023, 13.

<sup>290</sup> Idem.

<sup>291</sup> Bastian, J. (2024). Turkey: An Emerging Global Arms Exporter. Growing Competitiveness and Strategic Recalibration of the Turkish Defence Industry.

<sup>292</sup> For an overview, see Mevlütoğlu, A., Kurç, Ç., Güvenç, S., & Egeli, S. (2024). Adapting Security: The Intersection of Türkiye's Foreign Policy and Defence Industrialisation. *IIS*.

<sup>293</sup> Adar, S. (2024). Turkey in MENA, MENA in Turkey: Reasons for popularity, limits to influence. *SWP Research Paper*.

of power in favor of the GNA by providing crucial operational support<sup>294</sup>. Similarly, in Syria, Turkish drones were instrumental in operations such as Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Peace Spring.<sup>295</sup> Turkish drones also played a decisive role in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, where they were seen as “game changers” by helping Azerbaijan secure significant military gains against Armenian forces. More recently, during the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Ukrainian military has effectively utilized Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones against Russian forces. These drones have been pivotal in targeting Russian military assets, slowing down their advance, and providing critical intelligence support. While changes on the field have shown the limits of drones in certain types of warfare, there is no doubt that the Turkish military industry has further solidified its reputation and prestige.<sup>296</sup> As Selçuk Bayraktar, chairman of Baykar, noted, “After Ukraine, the whole world is a customer,” reflecting the surge in global demand for Turkish-made UAVs.<sup>297</sup> This has allowed Turkey to open new markets for its defense products, fostering deeper diplomatic and economic ties and reinforcing its military-industrial capabilities.<sup>298</sup> For instance, Turkish military exports to West Africa increased from \$83 million in 2020 to \$288 million in 2021, reflecting a significant expansion in market reach.<sup>299</sup> In Europe, Poland became the first NATO ally and EU member to purchase Turkish drones, specifically the Bayraktar TB2, in May 2021, while other European countries such as Hungary, Latvia, and Albania have also shown interest. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Turkey has sold drones and other military equipment to countries including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and Tunisia. Turkey’s defense industry has also made inroads into Central Asia, with countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan purchasing Turkish drones. In Africa, Turkey’s defense exports have grown rapidly, reaching countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, among others. Additionally, Ukraine has been a notable recipient, acquiring Turkish drones and negotiating further cooperation agreements. This expansion reflects Turkey’s strategic positioning as a growing player in the global arms market, leveraging its military products to establish new partnerships and bolster its geopolitical influence.

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<sup>294</sup> Soyaltin-Colella & Demirryol, 2023.

<sup>295</sup> Kasapoğlu, C. (2020). Turkey’s Burgeoning Defense Technological and Industrial Base and Expeditionary Military Policy. *Insight Turkey*, 22(Summer 2020), 115–130.

<sup>296</sup> The Turkish-made drones’ apparent success brought them into the international spotlight. TB2 strikes were featured in viral videos and even a patriotic Ukrainian song called “Bayraktar.” Civilians in Norway, Poland, and Canada organized campaigns to raise funds to purchase drones for Ukraine. See Anadolu Ajansı. (2022, July 22). *Fundraising campaigns for purchase of Türkiye’s Bayraktar TB2 drone spreading in West*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/fundraising-campaigns-for-purchase-of-turkiyes-bayraktar-tb2-drone-spreading-in-west/2643106>

<sup>297</sup> See the interview here: Bagirova, N. (2022, May 30). Exclusive: After Ukraine, “whole world” is a customer for Turkish drone, maker says. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-after-ukraine-whole-world-is-customer-turkish-drone-maker-says-2022-05-30/>.

<sup>298</sup> There is an ongoing debate about the real effectiveness of Turkish drones in such context. Rossiter, & Cannon, 2022.

<sup>299</sup> Adar, 2024, 13.

These sales are not only a testament to the technological capabilities of Turkey's defense sector but also serve as a diplomatic tool, enabling Turkey to forge new partnerships and strengthen its geopolitical position.<sup>300</sup> Firstly, the export revenues generated from these sales have increased the long-term sustainability of Turkey's defense sector, which is vital for maintaining its middle-power status.<sup>301</sup> Moreover, drone deals often go beyond one-time sales and include extended services such as training, maintenance, and spare parts, generating a larger revenue stream and fostering deeper bilateral relationships.<sup>302</sup> Secondly, by diversifying its export portfolio, Turkey has positioned itself as an alternative supplier for countries unable to access advanced technology from traditional Western arms sellers. This strategic positioning has allowed Turkey to penetrate markets in Africa, Asia, and Europe, creating new opportunities for economic and diplomatic engagement.<sup>303</sup> For instance, drone diplomacy has enabled Turkey to pursue a partnership with Ukraine, where a Free Trade Agreement was signed just weeks before Russia's invasion in February 2022, including a joint drone production deal.<sup>304</sup> In this case, drones and light military equipment represented the instrument through which Turkey could insert itself into the strategic scenario and anticipate the intervention of other major players. This was made possible by the relatively low cost of the drones combined with a certain degree of efficacy, especially in non-conventional warfare scenarios. In Africa, Turkey's drone exports seem closely linked to its diplomatic, trade, and security initiatives, a strategy that some analysts describe as "drone diplomacy."<sup>305</sup> Over the past decade, Ankara has strengthened its presence across the continent by opening new diplomatic missions, launching direct Turkish Airlines flights, and expanding defense and trade relationships. African countries, particularly those in the north but also in the west and other regions, have often purchased Turkish drones to combat jihadists and other insurgent groups in remote areas. In North Africa, Turkey has supplied drones to Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Morocco, for instance, added TB2 drones to its existing fleet of Chinese and Israeli models in 2021, primarily to support its conflict with the Polisario Front, a movement seeking independence for Western Sahara. Somalia is perhaps where Ankara has consolidated its profile in training special units engaged in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations and where "it leverages the defense and security sector as a vehicle to increase its influence in Africa and gain the

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<sup>300</sup> Idem.

<sup>301</sup> Bağcı & Kurç, 2017.

<sup>302</sup> Donelli, 2023.

<sup>303</sup> Coşkun, A. (2022). Strengthening Turkish Policy on Drone Exports. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

<sup>304</sup> Lanoszka, A., & Becker, J. (2023). The art of partial commitment: the politics of military assistance to Ukraine. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 39(3), 173-194.

<sup>305</sup> Akgönül, S., Can, M., & Ayaydin, E. (2023). Neoclassical Realist Perspective on Militarization of Turkish Foreign Policy. In M. Eslami & A. V. Guedes Vieira (Eds.), *The Arms Race in the Middle East: Contemporary Security Dynamics* (pp. 141–152). Springer International Publishing.

support of African countries in international organizations.”<sup>306</sup> Thirdly, since 2021, Turkey’s drone exports have increasingly aligned with its diplomatic efforts to improve relations and strengthen trade with former rivals, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia. In mid-2023, Ankara secured a substantial arms export agreement with Saudi Arabia, which included the sale of TB2 and Akıncı drones. Prior to this, Riyadh had purchased and co-produced Karayel-SU drones, several of which were reportedly shot down in Yemen’s civil war between factions supporting Yemen’s internationally recognized government and Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. The new agreement between Saudi Arabia and Turkey also involves a co-production arrangement with Baykar, although specific details remain undisclosed.

Nonetheless, while Turkey’s defense industry has achieved significant growth, it also faces substantial limitations and risks that could undermine its long-term sustainability and effectiveness.<sup>307</sup> First, from a strategic and diplomatic viewpoint, direct or indirect interventionism risks escalating violence in certain conflicts or undermining diplomatic initiatives in which Turkey is perceived more as a double-dealer than a sincere mediator.<sup>308</sup> Moreover, a significant limitation of Turkey’s “drone diplomacy” is that its success has led to counter-alignments among rival states. Since 2017, Turkey’s drone sales to nearly two dozen countries have portrayed it as a revisionist power, disrupting regional balances. This perception has driven countries such as Greece, Egypt, Cyprus, and France to form an informal alliance aimed at countering Turkey’s influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara has also observed the US ramping up military support to Greece, partially as a measure against Turkey. Furthermore,

Turkey faces the challenge of a perceived U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East, which could encourage Russia and Iran to expand their influence – something Turkey’s drones alone cannot counter without cooperative relations with regional allies. While drone diplomacy has provided Turkey and its clients with an operational edge, it has also created a nascent anti-Turkish bloc. Although this bloc may not pose a direct military threat, it diminishes Turkey’s potential investor and trade partner base, which is critical for its economic recovery. Consequently, this development has pushed President Erdoğan to evolve his foreign policy strategy from a predominantly drone-based, hard power approach to a more balanced, multilateral approach.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Donelli, F. (2022). UAVs and beyond: Security and defence sector at the core of Turkey’s strategy in Africa. *Policy Brief / Megatrends Afrika*, 7. Also the situation with Ethiopia is particularly notable, given that the delivery of combat UAVs coincided with a critical phase in the conflict between the federal government in Addis Ababa and the Tigray regional authorities. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed first expressed a clear interest in purchasing TB2 drones in the spring of 2021. After several weeks of discreet negotiations, the deal was finalized during Prime Minister Abiy’s visit to Ankara in August. During this visit, President Erdoğan approved the sale of combat drones to Ethiopia. In addition to the financial benefits from the sale of drones, Turkey also obtained the closure of ten schools affiliated with Gülen’s movement in Ethiopia, with these institutions subsequently transferred to Turkey’s state-run Maarif Foundation.

<sup>307</sup> SIPRI, 2016.

<sup>308</sup> For instance, Ethiopia came under the spotlight for causing civilian casualties with its Turkish-built drones, although the drones were credited with ending an offensive by Tigrayan rebels. Similarly, many have questioned Turkey’s ambiguous relations with Ukraine and Russia at the same time. See Reuters. (2024, April 8). *Russia complains to Turkey over drones sales to Ukraine, Turkish bureaucrat says*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-complained-turkey-over-drones-sales-ukraine-turkish-bureaucrat-2022-04-08/>.

<sup>309</sup> Interview.

Second, the most pressing challenge is the potential for economic overstretch.<sup>310</sup> As a middle-power country, “Turkey lacks the military and economic resources to manage protracted crises on multiple fronts. This hard-power approach, though achieving tactical successes, carries significant risks for Turkey’s economic and political stability.”<sup>311</sup> Turkey’s defense spending has grown considerably, reaching over \$20 billion in 2019. For some,

this is a significant allocation of national resources that could be used for other purposes. [Defense spending] is often perceived as an inefficient expenditure due to the high opportunity costs, as these funds could be diverted to critical areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure,<sup>312</sup>

Indeed, while the AKP has traditionally built its success on extraordinary economic performance,<sup>313</sup> the ongoing economic crisis since 2018, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has further complicated Turkey's ability to finance its ambitious military projects but also opened questions about the sustainability of its general foreign policy activism.<sup>314</sup> The Turkish lira’s devaluation against major currencies and concerns over President Erdogan's unorthodox economic policies have increased economic vulnerability. The decline in Turkey’s growth potential has been further highlighted by the fall in its GDP from \$954 billion in 2013 to \$754 billion in 2019, representing a drop of \$200 billion in six years. “This downturn has highlighted the tension between Turkey’s strategic ambitions and its material capabilities.”<sup>315</sup> Moreover, the economic costs of Turkey's militarized foreign policy extend beyond direct defense spending. The financial burden of hosting millions of Syrian refugees and the imposition of embargoes on Turkish goods in several Arab countries have added to the country's economic woes<sup>316</sup>. Rising inflation, financial instability, and a decrease in foreign direct investment have further strained Turkey’s economy, making it more challenging to sustain its current defense posture. Another significant limitation of Turkey’s defense industry is its reliance on foreign technology and components.<sup>317</sup> While Turkey has made significant strides in developing indigenous capabilities, it remains dependent on critical foreign technologies, such as semiconductors, microchips, and advanced materials.<sup>318</sup> This dependency creates a structural vulnerability, as embargoes or supply chain disruptions could severely impact Turkey’s defense

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<sup>310</sup> Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, 35.

<sup>311</sup> Interview.

<sup>312</sup> Interview with a member of civil society.

<sup>313</sup> Gökay, 2021.

<sup>314</sup> For an overview, see Öniş & Kutlay, 2021.

<sup>315</sup> This was stressed by many interviewees.

<sup>316</sup> Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, 35.

<sup>317</sup> Stergiou, A., & Kollias, C. (2022). The Political Economy of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 24(1), 42–59.

<sup>318</sup> Bastian, 2024, 4



capabilities.<sup>319</sup> For many, despite its achievements, Turkey's defense industry is still far from being a major global player, particularly when compared to leading arms exporters like the United States, Russia, and China.<sup>320</sup> According to even more critical views,

Turkish defense products, with the notable exception of drones, cannot compete with the advanced technology offered by major players. This lack of competitive power has led Turkey to target markets like the Middle East and Africa, where lower-tech products can find a foothold.<sup>321</sup>

In this sense, the increasing rate of nationalization in supplier chains has reduced some dependencies, but the industry still relies on advanced technologies and parts from foreign actors, limiting its potential for full-scale takeoff and enhanced security independence. Therefore, Turkey's growing military-industrial complex raises concerns about its potential influence on foreign policy decisions.

While the defense sector has become a central factor in Turkey's geopolitical calculations, there are concerns that it could evolve into a powerful lobby that shapes foreign policy to serve its commercial interests, as seen in other countries with mature military-industrial complexes.<sup>322</sup>

While it would be exaggerated to argue that Turkey's military operations are solely driven by the commercial interests of defense companies, the expansion of national wealth and the close relationship between business and government interests have increased the weight of economic considerations in foreign policy decisions.<sup>323</sup> The demonstration of military capabilities in different theaters is likely more about market expansion for Turkish defense products than ideological ambitions.<sup>324</sup> For some, "although international conditions influenced this development, they primarily allowed the government to leverage perceived international threats for electoral advantage."<sup>325</sup> For others,

these electoral benefits were secondary, rather than the primary cause, and the government capitalized on the opportunities created by international dynamics after the fact. Essentially, these conditions were not the drivers of military assertiveness but rather the outcomes of an already established foreign policy strategy. In a global context where the West [U.S. and EU] has shown a reluctance to intervene in crises, Turkey has carved out a space to act independently, pursuing its own goals while still benefiting from its ties to Western alliances. [...] Turkish foreign policy under the AKP seeks to maximize autonomy in decision-making rather than align itself with any specific identity. In other words, Turkey's primary ambition is to be a standalone power, [which] necessitates a certain degree of coercive strength.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Interview. For instance, see Soylu, R. (2021, February 4). Exports from Turkey to Saudi Arabia Plummet by 92 % amid Unofficial Boycott. *Middle East Eye*. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-saudi-arabiaexports-shrink-unofficial-boycott>.

<sup>320</sup> Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, 36.

<sup>321</sup> Interview.

<sup>322</sup> Interview.

<sup>323</sup> Ülgen, S. (2020). A Weak Economy Won't Stop Turkey's Activist Foreign Policy. *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>324</sup> Ciftci, 2023, 30.

<sup>325</sup> Interview. This will be assessed at the end of the chapter about the internal level.

<sup>326</sup> Interview. A similar comment in Aydıntaşbaş, A. (2021). Turkey Will Not Return to the Western Fold. *Foreign Affairs*.

Finally, another limitation for future developments might be the deeply personalized nature of Turkey's power projection network, "where President Erdoğan has personally handled many deals, commitments, and strategic decisions. As [he] will eventually have a successor, it remains uncertain whether a future leader with less geopolitical acumen could effectively manage the same system."<sup>327</sup>

## **7.2. The Internal Level**

Overall, one can certainly explain Turkey's question for strategic autonomy by looking at the fact that emerging powers no longer (want to) depend exclusively on the US for the defense of their economic and security interests, and Western powers' ability to impose discipline and enforce penalties for non-compliance has diminished with the waning of the unipolar US-led international order. As noted above and by other scholars, "Turkey's growing dissatisfaction with the liberal international order can be interpreted as a bargaining strategy."<sup>328</sup> However, the quest for autonomy goes beyond the balance of power politics, as Turkey's ambitious foreign policy activism is not necessarily matched by its material capabilities. That is why this thesis supports the understanding that the emphasis on strategic autonomy cannot be explained without considering the alterations in domestic politics, where the openly expressed desire for strategic autonomy, based on a new confidence in the country's international status, is considered a major discourse as a legitimating tool. Therefore, the next section explored the internal level to demonstrate how the Turkish government capitalizes on this discourse to consolidate its power and build cross-class support on the basis of an assertive populist nationalism.

### **7.2.1. The "Turkish Winter" and Internal Power Struggles**

As the previous section has demonstrated, TFP elites' emphasis on promoting "change" through the MENA region in the early 2010s was more than just rhetoric. The AKP leadership "truly believed that fostering democracy in the region would help elevate Turkey to a prominent regional power, acting as a bridge between a newly liberated Muslim world and the West, [...and] breaking down mental divides between Europe and the Middle East."<sup>329</sup> In 2010, a new law tasked the Ministry of

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<sup>327</sup> Interview.

<sup>328</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2021, 1089.

<sup>329</sup> Interview with former government officer.

Foreign Affairs with promoting democracy and human rights to “help achieve Turkey’s foreign policy aims in the Middle East.”<sup>330</sup> Thus, Ankara framed its support for political opposition as a “principled stance” by stating that “standing against the tyrant[s] is a moral question, a matter of justice.”<sup>331</sup> Moreover, other foreign and security policy experts in Turkey viewed the emphasis on popular legitimacy as reinforcing Turkey’s “Western character.”<sup>332</sup> However, Turkey’s decision to shift from a cautious stance to fully backing the demands of the Arab streets was not driven solely by a genuine desire to establish liberal democracies in the region nor merely by ideological alignment between the AKP and Islamist parties in the Arab world.<sup>333</sup> Instead, the political changes brought about by the Arab Spring provided the AKP with an opportunity to gain domestic prestige and political capital by supporting political change and fostering a new political class in the region.<sup>334</sup> In other words, by positioning itself as a model or source of inspiration for the emerging governments in the Arab world and making risky foreign policy decisions, the AKP sought to gain international recognition that could pay back its dividends into Turkish domestic politics. However, this rhetoric was also part of transnational power dynamics, where the AKP sought to enhance its prestige not merely by supporting ideologically similar movements but by imposing its vision of the social world on them and the political contexts in which they operated. Consequently, Erdoğan’s audacious comments on secularism and religion should be seen through the lens of symbolic power relations between groups, especially given his position as the leader of the dominant group in Turkey and his standing in countries like Egypt (where he initially received a warm welcome in Cairo). From a Bordieuan perspective, one might argue that the AKP’s approach to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and likeminded parties in the Arab world represented an effort “to universalize the particularisms of a single historical tradition” and to establish its perspective as the new common sense in Middle Eastern political discourse.<sup>335</sup> Such a strategy explains the frequent references to foreign policy in the party’s rhetoric domestically.<sup>336</sup> An example is Erdoğan’s speech after his 2011 electoral victory that, by linking the AKP’s success to these values in the region, connected a value-based foreign policy to the party’s dominant position:

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<sup>330</sup> Fidan, H. (2013). A Work in Progress: The New Turkish Foreign Policy. *Middle East Policy*, 20(1), 91–96.

<sup>331</sup> Idem In the same article, Hakan Fidan, then head of Turkish intelligence and currently Foreign Minister, observed that Turkey has in recent years moved further in the direction of defending the principles of democracy and human rights, especially in the context of the political transformation in the Middle East and North Africa. See Özel & Özkan, 2011. For a critical analysis of how Ankara’s foreign policy promotion changed from cooperative during the first half of the 2000s to confrontational after the Arab uprisings, see Huber, D. (2015). *Democracy Promotion and Foreign Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

<sup>332</sup> Kardaş, Ş. (2011). Turkey and the Arab Spring: Coming to Terms with Democracy Promotion. *German Marshall Fund of the United States*.

<sup>333</sup> Yeşilyurt, 2017; Özdamar, Ö., & Devlen, B. (2019). Man vs. the System: Turkish Foreign Policy After the Arab Uprisings. In R. Belloni, V. Della Sala, & P. Viotti (Eds.), *Fear and Uncertainty in Europe* (pp. 177–195). Springer International Publishing.

<sup>334</sup> D’Alema, 2022.

<sup>335</sup> Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1999). On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(1), 41.

<sup>336</sup> See Öniş, 2011, 49; Pala & Aras, 2015; and Özdamar, 2016, 102.

Today, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans have won as much as Turkey... We will become much more active in regional and global affairs. [...] we will take on a more effective role. We will call, as we have, for rights in our region, for justice, for the rule of law, for freedom and democracy.<sup>337</sup>

This strategy of building political capital did not end with the counterrevolutions – or, in Syria’s case, with the regime’s suppression of uprisings – in the MENA. On the contrary, the commitment to a pro-democracy foreign policy discourse helped Erdoğan maintain his leadership position in the AKP during times of crisis.<sup>338</sup> The 2013 coup in Egypt that ousted Morsi was portrayed as “an attempt to destroy democracy”<sup>339</sup>, and Erdoğan’s strong reaction was aimed at rallying religious and conservative groups behind the AKP. After the August 2013 Rabaa Square massacre (where the Egyptian military killed at least one thousand pro-Morsi protesters), references to the suffering of Egypt’s Islamists became a recurring theme in the AKP rhetoric, as seen in speeches following the 2014 local elections, with the four-finger salute (*Rabaa*) representing the massacre becoming a common symbol at Erdoğan’s rallies.<sup>340</sup> However, after mid-2015, as Turkey’s ambitions in the region and aspirations for resolving the Kurdish issue at home began to diminish, the meaning of the *Rabaa* sign underwent a significant transformation. In line with a more securitized and authoritarian political climate<sup>341</sup>, it shifted away from an Islamist narrative to a nativist-nationalist one, with a focus on ethnic identity rather than religious values. Thus, the four fingers began representing the core principles of the new AKP-led governments based on the motto “one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state.”<sup>342</sup> This was later incorporated into the party’s manifesto, and Erdoğan would lead his supporters in chanting it at the end of each rally to bolster backing for Turkey’s ongoing military actions against Kurdish political groups both domestically and abroad.

Although the debate on such a shift is extensive, the evolution of the AKP’s discourses demonstrates the attitude of its leadership attitude to adapt to its surroundings and changing power dynamics. While much of the scholarship focuses on populism as the sole interpretative framework

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<sup>337</sup> Quoted in Pala & Aras, 2015, 290.

<sup>338</sup> Quoted in Yegin, 2019, 412.

<sup>339</sup> Hoffmann & Cemgil, 2016, 1282; Yeşilyurt, 2017.

<sup>340</sup> Yeşilyurt, 2017, 37-38; Ayata, B. (2015). Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World: Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor? *Journal of European Integration*, 37(1), 106.

<sup>341</sup> The sharp turnaround was far from uncontroversial in Turkey itself. The opposition CHP argued that Erdoğan and Davutoğlu’s decision to burn bridges was counterproductive. A delegation led by Faruk Loğoğlu, the party’s deputy head, visited Damascus for several days in early September 2011 (and kept coming back in the years to follow). Others, while in agreement with the government’s decision to cut ties with the regime in principle, were unnerved by alleged its collusion with radical Islamists. Fears peaked when the opposition daily Cumhuriyet published evidence in May 2015 of MİT-commissioned trucks delivering weapons and ammunition to northern Syria, a scandal that had been brewing for more than a year. Turkey’s “adversaries” at the time also circulated stories of collusion. In December 2015, the Russian Ministry of Defense released satellite images purportedly showing the involvement by Erdoğan and members of his family in oil trade with ISIS. The scandal was ongoing from 2014. Cumhuriyet. (2014). “İşte Erdoğan’ın yok dediği silahlar.” <https://platform24.org/medya-izleme/iste-erdogan-in-yok-dedigi-silahlar/>. The videos circulated by the famous “mafya” member Sedat Peker in May-June 2021 also made allegations of weapon transfers to radical groups in Syria. See Taştekin, F. (2021, June 2). Turkish Mobster’s Revelations Extend to Arms Shipments to Syria. *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>342</sup> Taş, 2022.

and examines the “people vs. elite” dichotomy within national borders<sup>343</sup>, the constant negotiation, contestation, and reaffirmation of identities often occur through discursive practices, including foreign policy behavior.<sup>344</sup> Therefore, as Hakkı Taş suggests, the focus is not only on identifying and explaining state actions but on demonstrating the logic that underpins the “co-constitutive” relationship between representations of “the people” and foreign policy.<sup>345</sup> Furthermore, examining this chameleonic shift is particularly insightful in a field like foreign policy, which is typically more insulated from other government areas and based on established principles and traditions.<sup>346</sup> This is crucial in the case of the AKP. Although the party (and Erdoğan) is often portrayed as a singular, unified actor, the reality is that there have been multiple “versions of the AKP since its founding in 2001.”<sup>347</sup> The party continually evolves, adjusting to changing political contexts and shifting power dynamics, with flexibility becoming evident in its frequent policy changes and the ongoing revisions to its list of cabinets. In this sense, the diverse discourses and practices displayed by the AKP during its years in office might be explained through the phenomenon of a “dislocation” that entails re-linking disparate demands to create new antagonistic frontiers and re-signifying the elements to reach or maintain the moment. Therefore, analyzing the internal level of the AKP’s foreign policy after 2012 requires us to capture the ideological elements the party employed in reconfiguring those disparate demands. As Tanıl Bora describes<sup>348</sup>, the party embodies the “three phases of the Turkish Right”: conservatism, Islamism, and Turkish nationalism. Still, the lines between these three ideologies have often been blurred in Turkish politics, allowing for various mutations. As one pro-government columnist puts it: “Islamism is our water of life. Nationalism is the ice, and conservatism is the steam. All three nourish the same soil. The name of those soils is Turkey.”<sup>349</sup> Therefore, the interplay of these three ideologies results in a diverse and complex discourse, as the dislocation is never complete. Nevertheless, one ideology takes precedence in each period, becoming the dominant framework that shapes the populist narrative and foreign policy. While the theme of the virtuous, marginalized people standing against the corrupt elite persists after each shift, the definitions of “the people” and “the elite” are reinterpreted each time according to the prevailing ideological elements.

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<sup>343</sup> Aslanidis, P. (2016). Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective. *Political Studies*, 64(1\_suppl), 88–104.

<sup>344</sup> Despite extensive debate on the concept of populism, definitions generally agree on two key aspects: anti-elitism (which divides society into “the people” versus “the elite”) and people-centrism (which presents politics as an expression of the general will, aimed at restoring popular sovereignty). Due to its fluid nature, populism can only be understood through its outcomes. This article specifically explores how these outcomes manifest in foreign policy. Idem.

<sup>345</sup> Taş, 2022.

<sup>346</sup> Idem.

<sup>347</sup> Euronews. (2017). *Ertuğrul Günay: AK Parti büyük ölçüde tasfiye edildi*. <https://tr.euronews.com/2017/08/07/ertugrul-gunay-iktidar-risk-aliyor-muhalefetin-en-buyuk-riski-yorulmak-pahasina>.

<sup>348</sup> Bora, 2017.

<sup>349</sup> Küçük, C. (2017, April 24). Can suyumuz İslamcılığı. *X*. <https://twitter.com/cemkucuk55/status/856438177002860544>.

While these external events affected the AKP's standing in national politics, internal factors also drove the shift away from previous principles and the reconfiguration of the AKP's political discourse and mode of behavior. "There is nowhere more beautiful than the ballot box for criticism," Erdoğan had declared in 2007.<sup>350</sup> From the AKP perspective, what had once been the political underdog had transformed into what some saw as "the natural party of government."<sup>351</sup> Yet, as the party solidified its grip on power by winning a third term in the June 2011 elections, critics increasingly argued that the party's vision of democracy was narrowing, becoming little more than electoral victories while eroding essential checks and balances and opposition voices.<sup>352</sup> Indeed, there were signs of a shift in the incumbent executive approach to governance. The AKP initiated several institutional reforms, such as expanding the Constitutional Court and restructuring the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (*Hâkimler ve Savcılar Yüksek Kurulu*, HSYK). The source of contention, however, was the AKP's path toward major constitutional changes. Although these changes were publicly justified and internationally supported as moves toward democratization prompted by the EU accession process,<sup>353</sup> many saw them as strategies to consolidate Erdoğan's control over state institutions. As an observer noted,

The issue at stake was not the amendment itself [...] but the process that overruled the parliamentary process by leaving the final decision to a popular referendum [that] became again an occasion for the AKP to seek confirmation at the ballot boxes.<sup>354</sup>

After a campaign between the slogan "*yetmez ama evet*" (not enough but yes) of the conservative and some liberal-leftist circles and the claim "*yetmez*" (not enough) of the CHP and the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP), the AKP boosted its popular mandate by gaining around 58% of the votes total. As the social scientist Kalaycıoğlu observed at the time, Erdoğan "chose to maximize the fault lines in polarized Turkish society, which, was in the throes of a *Kulturkampf* waged between Muslim conservatives and secularists."<sup>355</sup> Overhauling the Constitution through a referendum, rather than a parliamentary process involving the obligatory give and take, exacerbated the "us-vs-them" divide, ripping apart the body politics.<sup>356</sup> This consolidation of power drew concern even from within the AKP's ranks. However, despite growing discontent, Gül

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<sup>350</sup> Tavernise, S. (2007). Turkish Court Blocks Islamic Candidate. *New York Times*.

<sup>351</sup> Duran & Kanat, 2020.

<sup>352</sup> Başkan, F., & Güney, A. (2012). Turkey's June 2011 Parliamentary Elections. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14(1), 165–174.

<sup>353</sup> BBC News. (2010, September 13). Turkish Reform Vote Gets Western Backing.

<sup>354</sup> Interview with a former MP.

<sup>355</sup> Kalaycıoğlu, E. (2012). *Kulturkampf* in Turkey: The Constitutional Referendum of 12 September 2010. *South European Society and Politics*, 17(1), 1–22.

<sup>356</sup> Idem.

maintained that Turkey's democracy had issues to resolve but still did not reach the point of no return.<sup>357</sup>

Yet, the events of 2013 would prove some fears valid: the party's commitment to "advanced democracy" (*ileri demokrasi*) was giving way to an authoritarian reality where the people's will was the ultimate judge, and President Abdullah Gül had to revert its opinion: "Democracy is not just the ballot box."<sup>358</sup> Indeed, in a moment when Turkey was trying to lead the "Spring" in the MENA region, these simmering internal tensions erupted in May 2013 with the Gezi Park protests. Described as "Turkish Spring (or Winter)," the protests began as a small, peaceful demonstration against the planned redevelopment of Gezi Park, one of Istanbul's last green spaces, into an Ottoman-themed shopping mall. On May 28, a handful of environmental activists set up tents to oppose the construction. However, the situation escalated dramatically when police, in a heavy-handed response, forcibly removed the protesters on May 29, using tear gas and water cannons. The protests quickly expanded beyond the issue of the park's redevelopment, becoming a larger movement against the government's authoritarian tendencies. For many, it was a moment of awakening – an assertion that "Turkish Spring" was unfolding in opposition to Erdoğan's regime. People from all walks of life<sup>359</sup>, including secularists, liberals, conservatives, nationalists, and former AKP supporters, joined forces in protest.<sup>360</sup> Though not the only explanatory factor, the coincidence with an external critical juncture played a significant role in shaping how the government read and reacted to these domestic events. First, returning from a trip to North Africa – where he had visited Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria – on June 7, Erdoğan immediately struck a defiant tone. He dismissed the protesters as "*çapulcu*" (looters) and blamed foreign conspiracies and "interest rate lobbies" for orchestrating the unrest, suggesting that these forces were intent on destabilizing Turkey's economy and government. He also portrayed the protests as the work of a "coalition of evil" (*şer ittifakı*), comprising foreign powers, domestic enemies, and traitorous elites.<sup>361</sup> In this sense, such a reaction was driven by a profound fear that what had happened to other leaders during the Arab Uprising could also happen to him. He saw in the Gezi protests a potential replay of the fate that befell leaders like Morsi in Egypt and or Gaddafi

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<sup>357</sup> Tepperman, J., & Gül, A. (2013). Turkey's Moment: A Conversation With Abdullah Gül. *Foreign Affairs*, 92, 2–7.

<sup>358</sup> NTV. (2013, June 3). *Gül: Demokrasi sadece seçim değildir*. [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/gul-demokrasi-sadece-secim-degildir\\_0A\\_1D3VKU2PZVyGX-ndfQ](https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/gul-demokrasi-sadece-secim-degildir_0A_1D3VKU2PZVyGX-ndfQ).

<sup>359</sup> To get a sense of the diversity of the protest, only around 41% of the participants had voted for the CHP in the 2011 elections. Waldman & Çalışkan, 2016, 103–4.

<sup>360</sup> A diverse coalition emerged, united by a desire to push back against what they perceived as the government's encroachment on civil liberties and disregard for democratic norms. As one observer noted, "What started as a very Turkish version of the Occupy Movement turned into a fight about the very definition of democracy." However, Though unprecedented in scale, the protests neither galvanized Turkish and Kurdish critics of the AKP to form a unified opposition nor turned into a sustainable political power. See Başaran, E. (2017). *Frontline Turkey: The conflict at the heart of the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris. See also Gençoğlu Onbaşı, F. (2016). Gezi Park protests in Turkey: From 'enough is enough' to counter-hegemony? *Turkish Studies*, 17(2), 272–294.

<sup>361</sup> Idem.

in Libya. Second, the Gezi protests also showed AKP's internal divisions. While Erdoğan adopted a hawkish tone, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç apologized for the police's excessive use of force and acknowledged the validity of the protesters' grievances, stating, "We got the message."<sup>362</sup> President Gül also struck a conciliatory tone, suggesting that the government should have handled the situation more carefully and hinted at a possible compromise.<sup>363</sup> However, Erdoğan quickly overruled these calls for moderation, refusing to concede any ground since he believed that the same forces that had driven the "Arab Spring" were at work in Turkey, seeking to topple his government and plunge the country into chaos.<sup>364</sup> Consequently, this pushed the AKP to adopt a "survival mode," viewing the protests not as legitimate dissent but as an existential threat.<sup>365</sup> The protests highlighted Erdoğan's determination to "maintain his grip on power at any cost, revealing the extent of his willingness to abandon democratic principles in favor of a more autocratic style of governance. [...] Gezi anticipated the next dark traits and steps they [the government] would then undertake."<sup>366</sup> Erdoğan's message soon after the protests was clear: "Respect for National Will" (*Millî İrade Saygı*)" was his rallying cry, and he criticized Gezi as "nothing more than the minority's attempt to dominate the majority."<sup>367</sup>

Following the protests, the AKP began to shift from an ideological vehicle for the "devout bourgeoisie" to an extension of Erdoğan's personalized rule.<sup>368</sup> This trajectory has been partly maintained through Erdoğan's ability to assert his claim as the legitimate representative of the AKP's base. A speech he delivered in 2013 before a crowd of supporters exemplifies this strategy: Erdoğan called out various countries and cities, and with each call, the crowd enthusiastically affirmed their presence, creating a sense of shared purpose and collective identity, even without any substantive policy statements.<sup>369</sup> However, internal rifts were apparent in the criticisms from intellectual and religious figures who had previously supported the AKP. For example, Mustafa Akyol argued that Erdoğan's Turkey was no longer a democratic model for the Middle East but resembled "a poor

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<sup>362</sup> BBC News. (2013, June 4). *Turkey Deputy PM apologises to Gezi Park protesters*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22767622>.

<sup>363</sup> Hürriyet. (2013, June 3). Cumhurbaşkanı Gül'den Gezi Parkı açıklaması.

<sup>364</sup> While a term called 'Mastermind' (*üst akıl*), which mainly shows the Jews as the leader of this foreign plot, was created, Washington "also took its share from the conspiracy theories as the CIA was accused of allocating \$24 billion to overthrow the AKP government." See Bechev, 2022, 126. See also Karaosmanoğlu, K. (2021). The discourse of *üst akıl*: A search for hegemony in the Turkish media. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(1), 77–99.

<sup>365</sup> Haugom, 2019, 213. See also Bayulgen et al., 2018.

<sup>366</sup> Interview with a civil society activist at the time and a journalist who observed the events closely.

<sup>367</sup> Cumhuriyet. (2013, June 11). *Gezi Parkı, işgal alanı değildir*.

<sup>368</sup> Gumuscu, 2023.

<sup>369</sup> It goes like this: "Now I ask, is Malaysia here, is Kuala Lumpur here?" The crowd replies with jubilation: 'Here!' So it goes on: 'Is Pakistan here, is Lahore here? Is Macedonia here, is Skopje here? Is Gostivar here? Is Prizren here? Is Pristina here? Is Bosnia here, is Sarajevo here? Is Zenica here? Is Angola here? Is Myanmar here?' Every time the audience answers, it goes on for minutes, from Gaza to Baghdad, from Basra to Aleppo. Erdoğan has not yet made a single substantive statement, but the audience is ecstatic and feels part of something big". Quoted in D'Alema, 2024.



imitation of the Kemalist ‘Old Turkey.’”<sup>370</sup> Domestically, the aftermath of the protests effectively ended the AKP’s alliance with liberal and pro-Western elements of civil society. The government moved quickly to consolidate power, intensifying its crackdown on media freedom, civil society, and the judiciary. More than 250 journalists, publishers, and activists were prosecuted.<sup>371</sup> Freedom House downgraded Turkey’s press to “not free” by 2014,<sup>372</sup> largely due to the crackdown on media outlets during and after the Gezi Park protests. This period saw the rise of conspiracy theories in pro-government media, which portrayed opposition voices as part of a foreign plot to destabilize Turkey, creating a climate of fear and suspicion. As such, internationally, the crackdown on the Gezi Park protests damaged Turkey’s image as a model for democratic governance in the Muslim world. The AKP’s confrontational stance and authoritarian measures led to deteriorating relations with Western countries. Erdoğan’s emphasis on national sovereignty and security and his frequent denunciations of foreign interference marked a shift away from Turkey’s earlier pro-European Union and reformist stance.<sup>373</sup>

#### 7.2.1.1. *Opening to the Kurds, Closing to Gülen*

Despite the Gezi events, the AKP’s promising period of democratic reforms “was all but over by the early 2010s, the party still had one redeeming grace:<sup>374</sup> the Kurdish issue and minority rights. As Erdogan told a Kurdish audience in the remote south-eastern town of Şemdinli in 2005:

We will respect secondary identities – that is, a Turk will say, “I am a Turk,” a Kurd will say, “I am a Kurd,” and a Laz will say, “I am a Laz” – everyone will be obliged to respect this. But we all have a primary identity as a citizen of the Turkish Republic.<sup>375</sup>

While the Europeanization process certainly had its share in pushing the government towards reforms<sup>376</sup>, the external level was not less relevant. Indeed, following the US-led invasion of Iraq in

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<sup>370</sup> Quoted in Özkeçeci-Taner, 2017, 21

<sup>371</sup> These figures were compiled by Turkish medical organizations. See Amnesty International. (2013, October 2). *Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Denial of the Right to Peaceful Assembly in Turkey*; Hürriyet. (2013, June 6). *Timeline of Gezi Park Protests*.

<sup>372</sup> Beiser, E. (2017). Record Number of Journalists Jailed as Turkey, China, Egypt Pay Scant Price for Repression. *Committee to Protect Journalists*; Freedom House. (2014). *Freedom of the Press 2014: Turkey*.

<sup>373</sup> Bilgiç, A. (2018). Reclaiming the National Will: Resilience of Turkish Authoritarian Neoliberalism after Gezi. *South European Society and Politics*, 23(2), 259–280.

<sup>374</sup> Bechev, 2022, 130.

<sup>375</sup> The Laz are an ethnic minority living in the Black Sea region of Turkey. Şemdinli had attracted national attention earlier that month when a bomb explosion in a bookshop in the town killed one bystander and injured another 13 people. On solid evidence, this was the work of two plainclothes non-commissioned officers in the paramilitary gendarmerie, aided by a former convicted PKK terrorist. Despite promises by Tayyip Erdoğan that those responsible would be brought to book, none of the culprits were punished. Hürriyet. (2005, November 21). *Üst kimlik polemîği*. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/sirinden-erdogana-suc-duyurusu-3548705>.

<sup>376</sup> Saylan, İ. (2012). The Europeanization process and Kurdish nationalism in Turkey: The case of the Democratic Society Party. *Nationalities Papers*, 40(2), 185–202.

2003 and the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish administration in northern Iraq, the PKK took advantage of the power shifts, ended its ceasefire in September 2003, and resumed attacks from its bases in the Qandil Mountains. By 2007, a new wave of PKK assaults, including a significant attack on October 21 that left 12 Turkish soldiers dead and eight kidnapped, escalated tensions further. In response, Turkey pressured the US for support against PKK bases in Iraq, leading to an agreement in November 2007 where President George W. Bush permitted Turkey to conduct limited operations with “real-time” intelligence provided by the US, albeit without eliminating the PKK threat. As the conflict dragged on, it became clear that a purely military solution was untenable. In the 2007 elections, the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP), which had replaced DEHAP as the main pro-Kurdish party and had informal ties with the PKK, secured representation in Parliament by running its candidates as independents.<sup>377</sup> This increased political visibility for Kurdish nationalism prompted Erdoğan to acknowledge multiple ethnic identities within Turkish citizenship, suggesting that Turks, Kurds, and other ethnic groups could maintain their cultural identities under a unified national identity as “citizens of the Turkish Republic.”<sup>378</sup> He further promoted a supra-national identity of *Türkiyelilik* (“from Turkey”), which embraced a multi-ethnic Turkish citizenship based on shared Islamic roots, seeking to mobilize the religious segments of the Kurdish population.<sup>379</sup> As Bechev notes,

Pacifying the southeast through a deal with Kurdish nationalists was a goal that suited Erdoğan. Virtually all locals, irrespective of their political leanings, favored greater linguistic and cultural rights for Kurds and the recognition of Kurdish identity. Doing away with the Turkish state’s traditional strategy of repression and containment promised to stabilize the region, possibly win votes for the AKP that was anyhow doing well with pious Kurds, as well as strengthen Ankara’s foreign policy. The question was how much the Turkish government was prepared to concede without risking a nationalist backlash.<sup>380</sup>

It was with this spirit that the AKP initiated the “Democratic Opening” process (*Demokratik açılım süreci*) in 2009. Formally termed the Unity and Fraternity Project (*Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi*), it was aimed to “issue circulars in the short term, pass laws in the medium term, and make constitutional amendments in the long term,”<sup>381</sup> namely to enhance democracy, expand freedoms,

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<sup>377</sup> See the special issue, O’Connor, F. (2017). *The Kurdish Movement in Turkey*. Peace Research Institute Frankfurt; JSTOR.

<sup>378</sup> “Turkish PM Addresses Kurdish Question,” Al Jazeera, August 30, 2005. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/8/30/turkish-pm-addresses-kurdishquestion>. On AKP’s policy towards the Kurds, see also Efeğil, “Analysis.”

<sup>379</sup> Günay, O., & Yörük, E. (2019). Governing ethnic unrest: Political Islam and the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 61, 9–43.

<sup>380</sup> Bechev, 2022, 142.

<sup>381</sup> Today-AZ (2010, January 9). *Turkey’s govt to send bills on Kurdish opening to Parliament*. <http://www.today.az/news/regions/59156.html>.

respect human rights, and end the long-standing conflict with the PKK.<sup>382</sup> The government also eased restrictions on Kurdish language broadcasting, with TRT launching a 24-hour Kurdish channel in 2009. This was coupled with new policies that allowed private Kurdish TV stations to operate and Kurdish language departments to be established in universities. TESEV, a pro-EU liberal think-tank, launched proposals for far-reaching reforms.<sup>383</sup> This was warmly welcomed by the EU's regular report as "a positive atmosphere around a possible solution to the Kurdish issue." Although many hurdles were still in place, Brussels noted the emergence of "a vibrant domestic debate [...] on this subject, involving public and political authorities."<sup>384</sup>

However, the Kurdish Opening faced significant challenges due to the security issue at play on the external level. The October 2009 arrival of 34 PKK members at the Habur border crossing, who were met with celebrations orchestrated by the DTP, provoked a nationalist backlash. This led the opposition parties CHP and MHP to criticize the AKP's move as a capitulation to terrorism, and the Constitutional Court subsequently banned the DTP for its alleged links to terrorism.<sup>385</sup> Erdoğan responded by pausing the initiative, stating "a break" was necessary, but he continued exploring other peace avenues. Indeed, it was clear that the government was trying to "keep nationalists quiet by continuing the military operations against the PKK while boosting its domestic credibility and consensus among Kurdish and liberal voters through the "democratic opening."<sup>386</sup> This strategy seemed to work, especially when leaked files revealed that secret negotiations, known as the "Oslo talks," had already begun in 2007 and involved Turkish intelligence officials and senior PKK members.<sup>387</sup> The head of the MİT at the time, Hakan Fidan, led the talks with the PKK and its leader Öcalan<sup>388</sup> on behalf of the government. Despite the sensitivity of these negotiations, which involved secret contacts and the granting of visiting rights to Kurdish MPs to consult with the PKK leader, they marked a significant step toward addressing the Kurdish issue politically. The Oslo talks yielded some progress, with the PKK declaring a series of ceasefires, including one in April 2009 and another in August 2010, meant to last until the June 2011 general elections. Concurrently, Prime Minister

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<sup>382</sup> The initiative proposed several reforms, such as dismantling the controversial village guards system, permitting elective Kurdish language courses in state schools, and increasing investment in southeastern Turkey. As part of the effort to recognize Kurdish culture, the public broadcasting agency, TRT, launched a 24-hour Kurdish-language channel, and the Council of Higher Education took steps to establish Kurdish-language and literature departments in universities. See Yeğen, M. (2015). The Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey: Genesis, Evolution and Prospects. *Global Turkey in Europe Working Paper*, 11, 5–11.

<sup>383</sup> For example, introducing Kurdish at schools, initially as an elective subject; a sweeping amnesty and the dismissal of the Village Guards; lowering the electoral threshold from 10% to 5%. See Kurban, D., & Yolaçan, S. (2008, December). *Kürt Sorunun Çözümüne Dair Bir Yol Haritası: Bölgeden Hükümete Öneriler*. TESEV.

<sup>384</sup> European Commission. (2009, October 14). *Turkey 2009 Progress Report*, 30.

<sup>385</sup> Kayhan Pusane, Ö. (2014). Turkey's Kurdish Opening: Long Awaited Achievements and Failed Expectations. *Turkish Studies*, 15(1), 81–99.

<sup>386</sup> Interview with former figure involved in the process.

<sup>387</sup> Çandar, C. (2020). Turkey's mission impossible: War and peace with the Kurds. Lexington Books, Chapter 8.

<sup>388</sup> He was serving a life sentence on İmralı Island.

Erdoğan held a series of round table conferences on the reforms in the Dolmabahçe Palace, with all kinds of social actors (including people from the media, the worlds of art, culture, and sports, and women's organizations), which were broadcast live on television.<sup>389</sup> However, for the same reasons, the process remained fragile. The leaked recordings of the Oslo talks provoked a backlash from Turkish nationalists, who accused Erdoğan of betraying national interests by negotiating with terrorists. The reaction forced the government to adopt a more cautious approach, temporarily stalling the peace process. Yet, the peace initiative regained momentum in late 2012 when Erdoğan publicly confirmed that negotiations with the PKK were ongoing.<sup>390</sup> During the Nowruz celebrations in March 2013, Abdullah Öcalan called for a ceasefire, declaring, "We have reached the point where weapons should go silent and ideas speak."<sup>391</sup> This statement, read aloud to a large rally in Diyarbakır, renewed hopes for a lasting peace and marked the beginning of the "Solution Process" (*Çözüm Süreci*).<sup>392</sup>

Mutual needs drove the Solution Process: the AKP sought to stabilize southeastern Turkey, enhance its standing among Kurdish voters, and potentially secure Kurdish support to push for a new presidential system; meanwhile, the PKK sought political legitimacy and a cessation of hostilities. In line with this strategy focused on the absorption of Kurdish demands within its principle of vision, the AKP also elaborated a new foreign policy discourse toward Kurdish entities in the Middle East and, therefore, new security practices.<sup>393</sup>

For instance, in November 2013, during a state visit of the Kurdistan Regional Government's President Masood Barzani to Diyarbakır, Erdoğan referred to the region in Northern Iraq as "Kurdistan,"<sup>394</sup> an utterance usually rejected by the Kemalist political agents.<sup>395</sup> During the same event, Erdoğan also affirmed that "[r]ejection, denial, and assimilation have ended with our government,"<sup>396</sup> thus further encouraging the image of the AKP as the agent of the Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation, both in the national political field and in the Middle East.

This intersection between the integrationist and democratic strategy vis-à-vis Kurds at home and the amicable relationship with Iraqi Kurds shows how the power struggle over the national political field affected foreign policy. As part of this strategy of accumulation, the AKP government initially tried to engage with Syria's PYD.<sup>397</sup> However, the process faced two significant challenges. First, Turkish nationalism remained deeply ingrained in the internal political level, and violent actions

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<sup>389</sup> Çandar, 2020.

<sup>390</sup> Kayhan Pusane, 2014.

<sup>391</sup> BBC News. (2013, March 21). *Öcalan's Statement: Key Excerpts*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21885582>.

<sup>392</sup> The letter came after months of negotiation between him and the authorities, as Erdoğan admitted in late 2012. Çandar, 2020, Chapter 9.

<sup>393</sup> Interview with a subject expert.

<sup>394</sup> Necef, M. Ü. (2013). Barzani and Erdogan Meet in Diyarbakır: A Historical Day. *Center for Contemporary Middle East Studies at SDU*, 3.

<sup>395</sup> Lundgren, Å. (2007). The unwelcome neighbour: Turkey's Kurdish policy. Tauris, 86.

<sup>396</sup> Quoted in Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015, 309.

<sup>397</sup> See the previous section on the Arab Uprisings.

by the PKK constrained the AKP's discourse. Second, the AKP's approach was challenged by the Kurdish nationalist movement, represented by the BDP and, from 2014, the Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP). While some Kurds supported the AKP's efforts under the “*yetmez ama evet*” (It's not enough, but yes) stance, others, adopting the “*yetmez*” (not enough) position, were skeptical of the government's limited concessions and its commitment to genuine reconciliation.<sup>398</sup> Kurdish leaders, such as Öcalan and Selahattin Demirtaş, co-chair of the HDP, demanded broader political reforms, including greater autonomy, which were non-negotiable for the Turkish state. Meanwhile, Kurdish activists never fully bought Erdoğan's claim that he stood for historic reconciliation and democratic deepening. Skepticism about the Turkish state's goodwill, no matter who happened to be in charge, Islamists or secularists, was pervasive.<sup>399</sup> “Radical voices warned that Öcalan, an idol for nationalist Kurds, had no right to speak on behalf of the entire community.”<sup>400</sup> For others, “the image of two great men, Tayyip and Apo, in command of their respective tribes smacked of patriarchy.”<sup>401</sup> As a consequence, Kurdish activists hedged their bets. That is why BDP supporters – but not party cadres – joined the Gezi protests in the summer of 2013 alongside Erdoğan's opponents from across the political spectrum. At a more individual level, the anti-government Gezi protests in June 2013 mobilized small sections of the Turkish population, most of whom had previously perceived the Kurdish issue as solely a terrorism problem, into questioning dominant narratives and expressing greater empathy with Kurdish concerns.<sup>402</sup> Consequently, the BDP significantly increased its share of the national vote in the 2014 elections to 9.76%. The space that the Peace process created for self-expression for the Kurdish movement gradually erased certain taboos and opened room for dialogue among different segments of Turkish society. This was also reflected in Turkish public opinion as, in early May 2013, a survey conducted showed that the number of supporters for the peace process increased to 81.3%.<sup>403</sup> Yet, these multiple obstacles saw the Solution Process falter by late 2014 and early 2015. As will be seen later, several factors contributed to this breakdown: ongoing violence and attacks by the PKK, political maneuvering ahead of the 2015 elections, and regional dynamics, particularly the rise of the Syrian Kurdish entities.

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<sup>398</sup> Based on interview made by the author(s) in Abrami et. al, 2025.

<sup>399</sup> This happened despite the creation of a “Wise Men's Commission (*Akil Adam Komisyonu*)” then, renamed “Wise Persons Commission (*Akil İnsanlar Komisyonu*)”. Interview with a former member of the Commission.

<sup>400</sup> Interview with a Kurdish political activist.

<sup>401</sup> Osman Baydemir in Bechev, D. & European Council on Foreign Relations (Eds.). (2011). *What does Turkey think?*; See also Waldman & Çalışkan, 2017, 184–9.”

<sup>402</sup> Rumelili & Çelik, 2017, 290.

<sup>403</sup> T24. (2013, June 5). *KONDA'nın son anketi: Çözüm sürecine destek yüzde 81.3'e ulaştı.* <https://web.archive.org/web/20130509015843/http://t24.com.tr/haber/kondanin-son-anketi-cozum-surecine-destek-yuzde-813e-ulasti/229284>.

In conjunction with the “opening to the Kurds,” the government began to break ties with another sociopolitical actor that concurrently influenced the external and internal level. Indeed, when the Gezi protests erupted, Fethullah Gülen’s Hizmet movement used its powerful media and institutional channels to criticize the government’s repression, challenging Erdoğan’s position as the legitimate representative of the dominant social class.<sup>404</sup> On the one hand, this can be related to the fact that, since 2011, Turkey’s national role conception and the narrative framing its foreign policy have undergone a profound transformation.<sup>405</sup> This mirrored the evolving socio-political dynamics within Turkey because the AKP’s third term in 2011 coincided with an increasingly power centralization in the hands of the Prime Minister.<sup>406</sup> During this period, the influence of “other non-likeminded political bodies” over the media, judiciary, and military had already been significantly marginalized.<sup>407</sup> Turkey experienced a rapid process of what scholars have termed “AKP-ization” of political institutions, meaning an internal reshuffling occurred within the ruling party, with Erdoğan solidifying his control and sidelining any dissenting voices.<sup>408</sup> This dual process – Turkey’s move towards an AKP-centered system and the AKP’s increasing “Erdoğanization” – had significant implications for the country’s foreign and domestic policy, including its relationship with Fethullah Gülen and his Hizmet movement. These dynamics set the stage for a substantial rupture between the AKP and the Gülenists, as Erdoğan’s growing dominance came into conflict with the ambitions of the Hizmet cadre.<sup>409</sup> On the other hand, this was also “the culmination of a process that was already excavating underneath.”<sup>410</sup> Indeed, the alliance between the AKP and the Gülen movement, which initially helped both groups consolidate power against the secularist establishment, had already begun to fray in 2009 with the divergences over the Mavi Marmara case.<sup>411</sup> Another crack occurred when Erdoğan’s shift to a more pragmatic stance on the Kurdish issue sparked significant opposition from the Gülenists. Unable to establish themselves in the predominantly Kurdish regions due to the PKK’s threats, they deemed the Peace process as a betrayal and maintained a hardline nationalist position against any engagement with the PKK terrorist organization.<sup>412</sup> Moreover, this also reflected the growing power of the Gülenists within the state apparatus, particularly in the judiciary, police, and

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<sup>404</sup> In typically cryptic language he said: “If the Pharaoh is against you, if Croesus is against you, it means you are walking on the right path. Financial Times. (2013, November 22). *Islamist splits threaten Erdogan’s rise to Presidency*.

<sup>405</sup> Donelli, 2020, 223.

<sup>406</sup> Bayer & Keyman, 2012

<sup>407</sup> Kuru, A. T. (2012). The Rise and Fall of Military Tutelage in Turkey: Fears of Islamism, Kurdism, and Communism. *Insight Turkey*, 14(2), 37–57.

<sup>408</sup> Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018.

<sup>409</sup> Balci, 2023, 515.

<sup>410</sup> This was remarked in many interviews with former MPs and civil society members.

<sup>411</sup> See the previous section.

<sup>412</sup> Balci, 2023, 516. See also Matthees, K., & Seufert, G. (2013). Erdoğan and Öcalan Begin Talks: A Paradigm Shift in Turkey’s Kurdish Policy and a New Strategy of the PKK’. *SWP Comment*.

intelligence services, allowing them to disrupt the AKP's credibility and governance. This infiltration resulted in actions of monitoring, collecting, and later leaking sensitive information that damaged the AKP's reputation.<sup>413</sup> The confrontation escalated in February 2012 when Gülenist prosecutors issued an arrest warrant for Hakan Fidan, the head of MİT and a close ally of Erdoğan, accusing him of having connections with the PKK after the "Oslo talks" during the "Peace process."<sup>414</sup> This bold move "sent a clear message to Erdoğan: the Gülenists controlled significant parts of the judiciary and could challenge his authority by targeting his most trusted associates."<sup>415</sup> Erdoğan quickly responded by pushing legislation to protect Fidan and other intelligence officials from prosecution without executive approval.<sup>416</sup> However, by targeting Erdoğan's inner circle, the Gülenists signaled that their struggle for influence had become an open conflict.

The conflict reached a critical phase in December 2013, when a series of corruption and bribery investigations led by Gülenist-aligned prosecutors and police officers were launched against critical figures within the AKP, including members of Erdoğan's own family.<sup>417</sup> The Gülenists' aim in exposing these scandals appeared to force Erdoğan's resignation and provoke a political crisis. Instead, it triggered an intensified crackdown by the government. The AKP responded to these threats by doubling down on its narrative of a "parallel state" orchestrated by Gülenist conspirators working within the Turkish bureaucracy to undermine national interests. Erdoğan labeled these investigations a "judicial coup," accusing the Gülen movement of orchestrating a plot to topple his government.<sup>418</sup> He referred to them as the "Fethullah Terrorist Organization" (FETÖ), a term that would quickly become recurring in the AKP's narrative to protect the state. This narrative justified a comprehensive purge that went beyond the judiciary and police, reaching into the military, education, media, and private sector.<sup>419</sup> In a bid to undermine the Gülen movement's financial base, Erdoğan's

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<sup>413</sup> They also played a role in leaking the so-called "sex tape" in 2010 that led to the resignation of Deniz Baykal, the leader of the main opposition party, the CHP. See Korkmaz, Ö. (2014, March 26). *Tape wars: Who is behind Baykal scandal?* <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/ozgur-korkmaz/tape-wars-who-is-behind-baykal-scandal-64160>.

<sup>414</sup> See also the alleged involvement of the GM in the KCK (Koma Civaken Kurdistan—Union of Communities in Kurdistan) investigations from 2009. Toktamis, K. F., & David, I. (2018). Repression and resistance – fragments of Kurdish politics in Turkey under the AKP regime. *Turkish Studies*, 19(5), 661–670.

<sup>415</sup> Interview with former MP.

<sup>416</sup> It has been claimed that Erdoğan saw the attempt to prosecute Hakan Fidan as a "declaration of war" by the Gülenists. See Haber7. (2012, February 10). *Hakan Fidan'ı hedef alan 3 odak*. <https://www.haber7.com/ic-politika/haber/842521-hakan-fidani-hedef-alan-3-odak>.

<sup>417</sup> These investigations implicated high-ranking officials and businessmen close to the government in a web of illegal activities. For instance, one of the targets of the corruption scandals was Reza Zarrab, a Turkish-Iranian businessman, who was accused of money laundering and bribery charges. Zarrab was arrested in the US in March 2016 on accusations of helping Iran to avoid international sanctions by using the Turkish public bank (Halkbank) during 2013 and 2014 by sending gold to Iran in return for oil and natural gas. His arrest in the US in 2016 on charges related to these dealings underscored the international dimension of the scandal, placing further pressure on Erdoğan's administration. See Schanzer, J. (n.d.). The Biggest Sanctions-Evasion Scheme in Recent History. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/iran-turkey-goldsanctions-nuclear-zarrab-atilla/549665/>.

<sup>418</sup> Martin, 2022, 118.

<sup>419</sup> Thousands of police officers, judges, and prosecutors were dismissed or reassigned. The government also introduced new laws to enhance its control over the judiciary and intelligence services. The government granted expanded powers to the MİT, making it illegal to publish information on its activities and imposing prison sentences of up to nine years for violations.

administration moved to close down Gülenists private tutoring schools (*dershane*). In April 2014, simultaneously, the AKP intensified its crackdown on Gülenist-linked media outlets like the *Zaman* newspaper in early 2016<sup>420</sup>. By 2015, Erdoğan was referring to the Gülen movement as FETÖ, depicting it as a terrorist organization intent on overthrowing the government. The Turkish Interior Ministry published a list of ‘most-wanted terror suspects’ which included Gülen and other senior alleged “*Fethullahci*”, alongside members of the PKK, ISIS, and leftist groups.<sup>421</sup>

Overall, “ironically, the causes of the gradual disintegration of the Gülen-AKP relationship after 2010 stem from the illiberal nature of their alliance, as manifested by Ergenekon, Balyoz, and other investigations.<sup>422</sup> The relationship, therefore, became “a power struggle between a ruling party which had established its power through illiberality and now feared the partner which had helped it to do so.”<sup>423</sup> As such, the rift with Gülen confirmed the fears of many Turks: that the two groups had cooperated using nefarious means to discredit their opponents within the Turkish political system, primarily the military, but also various journalists and academics. As Emma Sinclair-Webb stated at the time: “The events of the past three months threw a stark light on the way the AKP government and Gulenists used the justice system in the past for common political ends. The result has been a clear erosion of the rule of law.”<sup>424</sup> It also put Erdoğan in the defensive “survival mode” and arguably more determined to consolidate his power.<sup>425</sup> The internal conflict between the AKP and the Gülen movement had profound implications for Turkey’s foreign policy, contributing to Turkey’s growing isolation. First, the rupture with the Gülenists drained the AKP’s capacity to implement its soft power tools in regions like the Balkans and Sub-Saharan Africa, where the GM had been a strong asset. Second, as Erdoğan increasingly relied on nationalist rhetoric and scapegoated foreign entities for domestic troubles, relations with Western allies soured. For instance, Turkey’s bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2014 was met with a resounding defeat, receiving only 60 out of 193 votes. Erdoğan’s increasing assertiveness in foreign policy, demonstrated by moves such as sending a seismic research vessel accompanied by Turkish naval forces to monitor gas and oil exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2014, aimed to distract from domestic troubles and project strength abroad. However, these actions further isolated Turkey in regional and international politics, underscoring the consequences of its internal power struggles.

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<sup>420</sup> The government appointed a pro-AKP editorial team and accused the publication of supporting a terrorist organization

<sup>421</sup> Martin, 2022, 116.

<sup>422</sup> Idem.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>424</sup> Sinclair-Webb, E. (2014). In Turkey’s Political Contest, Rule of Law is the Real Loser. *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/emmasinclairwebb/in-turkeys-political-contest-rule-of-law-is-real-loser>.

<sup>425</sup> Martin, 2022, 118.



### 7.2.1.2. *Informal Rules in the Decision and Policy-Making*

The AKP and Erdoğan's growing consolidation of power and increasingly authoritarian style had profound repercussions also within the party. The political balance that had existed within the AKP leadership began to unravel when, with Gül assuming the officially nonpartisan Presidency and Bülent Arınç simultaneously ending his term as the speaker of Parliament, two of Erdoğan's key moderating allies were effectively sidelined. Since both had previously played a crucial role in "tempering Erdoğan's more assertive impulses within the party"<sup>426</sup>, in their absence, a "more personalist style of leadership emerged, marked by purges of those aligned with them."<sup>427</sup> By 2013, this process had extended to Gül himself and later to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu through a series of cabinet reshuffles and party reorganizations. The 2013 corruption scandal significantly tested the AKP's internal cohesion. Several cabinet members were dismissed, but no formal investigation was launched, revealing "the extent to which the party's internal mechanisms had been compromised."<sup>428</sup> Gül, who had publicly distanced himself from Erdoğan during the Gezi Park protests and later expressed his preference for reforming the existing parliamentary system, was effectively barred from formally returning to politics once his presidential term ended. In August 2014, Erdoğan assumed the Presidency. Though an officially nonpartisan role that forced him to pass party leadership to the Prime Minister, in practice, he retained control in many realms. As such, it is fair to claim that Erdogan's firm grip over the party and government "did not officially begin with the 2017 constitutional amendments but rather when he took office on August 28, 2014."<sup>429</sup> By then, he had already completed two and a half terms as Prime Minister, during which he had become one of Turkey's most powerful and influential politicians.<sup>430</sup>

The transition to the Presidency was about more than adapting to the office's requirements but reshaping the institution to fit his vision and style. Before his inauguration, the AKP convened an extraordinary party congress, during which Erdoğan reiterated Turkey's need for a new Constitution. This move led to a boycott of his swearing-in ceremony by the opposition CHP, including its leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. Meanwhile, the AKP congress elected Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Foreign Minister, as the new leader and Prime Minister, ostensibly to take charge of the executive branch and legislative agenda: "Davutoğlu was chosen precisely because he posed no threat; [...] a former academic with

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<sup>426</sup> Maximilian Popp, "Turkish Power Struggle: Brotherly Love Begins to Fray in Ankara," Spiegel Online, June 25, 2013; and Lauren Williams, "Turkey's AKP Power Struggle Comes to a Boil," Al Jazeera, August 26, 2014.

<sup>427</sup> Interviews with former MPs and Interview with a former political advisor.

<sup>428</sup> Idem.

<sup>429</sup> Bechev, 2022, 138.

<sup>430</sup> Idem.

no experience in electoral politics, he owed his political career to Erdoğan and was seen as unlikely to challenge him.”<sup>431</sup> Thus, Erdoğan maintained ultimate control over key decisions, such as vetting electoral lists in the lead-up to the June 2015 elections. In an unprecedented move for a supposedly impartial President, he actively campaigned in the elections, holding rallies and chairing cabinet meetings. In this sense, while Erdoğan’s approach was not without precedent – previous leaders like Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel had also sought to exercise power from the Presidency – “no one had pushed the 1982 Constitution’s limits as Erdoğan did.”<sup>432</sup> He argued that having been directly elected, he had a stronger popular mandate than his predecessors, claiming to represent the national will more fully. The final proof of the *de facto* establishment of a semi-presidential regime came when the tensions between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu had become public, with disagreements over handling corruption allegations against senior AKP members, negotiations with the PKK, political appointments, and Turkey’s international representation. The publication of the “Pelican File”<sup>433</sup> by Erdoğan loyalists, including his son-in-law Berat Albayrak, detailed these points of conflict and effectively precipitated Davutoğlu’s resignation on May 3, 2016. He was replaced by Binali Yıldırım later that month. This “palace coup” (*saray darbesi*) demonstrated that Turkey “had become a presidential republic in all but name and marked the culmination of the AKP’s transformation into a party wholly subservient to Erdoğan”.<sup>434</sup> In other words, “what replaced the original AKP was a network bound by nepotism and personal loyalty to Erdoğan, rather than any coherent ideology or shared roots.”<sup>435</sup> Indeed, this network included family members like Berat Albayrak and Ziya İlgen, allies from the military and security services such as Hakan Fidan and Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, who played crucial roles during the July 2016 coup attempt. Political lieutenants like Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu and Binali Yıldırım, as well as technocrats like Vice-President Fuat Oktay and presidential spokesman Fahrettin Altun, formed part of this circle.<sup>436</sup> Although these figures often had conflicting interests, their survival and political futures were intricately tied to Erdoğan’s continued dominance.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Interviews with former MPs and Interview with a former political advisor.

<sup>432</sup> Conversation with a Turkish Lawyer.

<sup>433</sup> Smith, H. L. (2019). *Erdoğan rising: The battle for the soul of Turkey*. William Collins, see Chapter 4.

<sup>434</sup> Interview with Turkish Bureaucrat. Abdullah Gül was officially removed from the list of the AKP’s co-founders sidelined, and Bülent Arınç, another key figure who served as Parliament speaker and deputy Prime Minister, resigned in August 2015 over the collapse of the Kurdish peace process. Other prominent figures like Ali Babacan, a key architect of Turkey’s economic policy, also left. The final purge included Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan, who resigned alongside Davutoğlu, and Interior Minister Efkan Âlâ, who stepped down in August 2016. By the end of the decade, these former AKP leaders had formed splinter parties such as Gelecek Partisi (Future Party), established by Davutoğlu, and Deva (Democracy and Progress Party), led by Gül and Babacan. See Flanagan et al. 2020, Introduction.

<sup>435</sup> Interview with a Turkish Bureaucrat.

<sup>436</sup> For an overview, Danforth, N. (2020). *The Outlook for Turkish Democracy: 2023 and Beyond*. *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

<sup>437</sup> The dynamic among these different factions has become a subject of intense speculation, akin to the “Kremlinology” of the Soviet era, often referred to in Turkey as “*Saraylogy*,” after the presidential palace (*Saray*). The regime thrives on a combination of patronage

The growing domestic challenges and foreign policy setbacks of the period well explain how the AKP lost its parliamentary majority in the June 2015 elections. Moreover, a noteworthy factor was the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) surpassing the 10% electoral threshold, securing 80 seats and thus diminishing the AKP's share of votes and parliamentary control. Despite ideological similarities, the AKP and the MHP failed to form a coalition, mainly due to the latter's refusal to join any alliance and lingering tensions between the parties' leaders after the corruption scandals, prompting Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to create a temporary cabinet. As noted earlier, during this phase, Turkey's agenda was also occupied by escalating terrorist attacks linked to ISIS and the PKK on national soil.<sup>438</sup> When a PKK attack on September near the Turkish border killed 17 people, President Erdoğan, remarked, "If a party had got 400 seats in the elections and reached the required number in Parliament to change the Constitution, the situation would be different."<sup>439</sup> Seeking to regain power, the AKP pushed for new elections and intensified its crackdown on domestic opposition through media censorship. On October 10th, the deadliest terrorist attack in Turkish history occurred at Ankara's main train station, targeting a demonstration of leftists and Kurdish activists, killing over 100 people. While the government blamed ISIS, no group claimed responsibility. In retaliation, Turkey launched airstrikes against PKK positions in Iraq and ISIS targets in Syria. "These terror attacks and the AKP's dual-front counterterrorism efforts boosted nationalist support ahead of the November reelection."<sup>440</sup> The AKP also revised its foreign policy stance by opening Turkish airbases to US-led coalition forces against ISIS. These moves helped the AKP regain its parliamentary majority in the November elections, demonstrating the success of its strategy to manipulate both domestic and foreign policy to its advantage.

However, some analysts argue that Erdoğan began to view his hold on power as crucial to his personal and physical survival.<sup>441</sup> The AKP's failure to secure a supermajority in the June 2015 elections, which would have enabled Erdoğan to push through constitutional changes to strengthen his presidential powers, revealed his reliance on the party's continued electoral success to achieve

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and cronyism, with business elites profiting from state-sponsored mega-projects like Istanbul's new airport, the third bridge over the Bosphorus, and the redevelopment of Taksim Square. Family ties, political power, and financial interests are tightly interwoven, exemplified by Erdoğan and his wife Emine acting as witnesses at high-profile weddings between influential business families closely connected to the palace. As Esen and Gumuscu argue, clientelism also accounts for the AKP's authoritarian turn. Esen, B., & Gumuscu, S. (2021). Why did Turkish democracy collapse? A political economy account of AKP's authoritarianism. *Party Politics*, 27(6), 1075–1091. Also, Buğra & Osman, 2014.

<sup>438</sup> On July 20th, an ISIS suicide bomber attacked a gathering of leftist Kurdish activists in Suruç, killing over 30 people. In response, the PKK blamed the government for the attack and resumed its armed struggle against Turkish forces, effectively ending the Kurdish peace process initiated in 2013.

<sup>439</sup> Cumhuriyet. (2015, September 8). Erdoğan: 400 vekil alinsaydı durum farklı olurdu.

<sup>440</sup> Interview with expert.

<sup>441</sup> As reported, "Several interlocutors noted a personal component to this, implying that Erdoğan was also concerned about possible legal persecution once out of office, given his own previous experiences in prison, the 2013 Egyptian coup against democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi, and the corruption charges against Erdoğan's family in late 2013." See Flanagan et al., 2020, 45.

this goal, setting the stage for a significant alteration in Turkish politics. Beyond Turkey's turn toward authoritarianism, Erdoğan adopted a new strategy to ensure his political survival after the June 2015 elections. As the HDP campaigned explicitly against presidential ambitions, Erdoğan understood that maintaining a liberal stance toward the PKK could alienate more nationalist voters than it would gain among Kurdish and liberal constituencies.<sup>442</sup> This was related to a pragmatic and strategic calculation: in the June 2015 elections, the AKP and MHP secured most of the votes in the conservative, nationalist Anatolian heartland, while the CHP held onto its base along the Aegean, parts of the Mediterranean coast, and urban areas, and the HDP won in the Kurdish southeast. One notable outcome was the MHP's gain of over 1.1 million votes at the expense of the AKP. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli had already declared in March 2015 that he would not recognize Erdoğan<sup>443</sup>, accusing him of “constitutional crimes” and corruption, and he resisted joining a coalition with the AKP after the June vote.<sup>444</sup> However, by abandoning the Peace process with the PKK and sidelining the Gülenists, the AKP secured the MHP's support for the 2017 constitutional referendum and the 2018 elections. Nonetheless, while the November 2015 polls showed Erdoğan as a brilliant tactician who, once again, overcame an adverse situation, turning it in his favor, the price the country as a whole paid was an “exit from democracy”<sup>445</sup> and the metamorphosis of the government into a hybrid regime with an all-powerful President at the top.

## **7.2.2. Toward the AKP-MHP Symbiosis: Conservative Nationalism and Competitive Authoritarianism**

### **7.2.2.1. The 2016 Coup and the Institutional Reshuffle**

On July 15, 2016, Turkey faced one of the “longest nights” of its modern history when a faction of the Turkish Armed Forces attempted a coup against the government of President Erdoğan.<sup>446</sup> The insurgents, calling themselves the “Peace at Home Council” (*Yurtta Sulh Konseyi*), launched a well-orchestrated operation involving attacks on critical government sites, including the

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<sup>442</sup> Interview with a Turkish political analyst. Previously, before the June 2011 elections, Erdoğan had appealed to nationalist sentiments by ordering the demolition of the Statue of Humanity, a symbol of dialogue and reconciliation, on the Turkish-Armenian border.

<sup>443</sup> Hürriyet. (2015, May 22). ‘I do not recognize Erdoğan as President,’ MHP head says. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/i-do-not-recognize-erdogan-as-President-mhp-head-says-82780>.

<sup>444</sup> Kumbaracıbaşı, A. C. (2019). Analyzing Party Positions and Electoral Dynamics in Turkey. *International Journal of Political Science and Urban Studies*, 7(2), 394.

<sup>445</sup> Öktem, K., & Akkoyunlu, K. (2016). Exit from democracy: Illiberal governance in Turkey and beyond. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 469–480.

<sup>446</sup> Aykol, M. (2016, July 19). Turkey's longest night. *Hürriyet*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/mustafa-akyol/turkeys-longest-night-101821>.

Turkish Parliament and the headquarters of the MİT.<sup>447</sup> Despite its initial momentum, the coup attempt quickly faltered, leaving approximately 290 people dead, including more than 100 alleged coup plotters, and over 1,400 injured. As some later analyses showed, it is probable that the Turkish government was

not aware of *when* it would happen *but* was somehow aware of the potential for a coup and had been preparing to purge the ranks of those suspected of disloyalty. That is why the decision [of the plotters] to act prematurely turned out to be a critical error, as it undermined their chances of achieving the element of surprise.<sup>448</sup>

While investigations are still underway today, there are credible reports that the coup attempt was mounted so haphazardly because the plotters became aware of government plans for imminent mass arrests of suspected Gülenists within the TSK in connection with an ongoing espionage investigation. These reports indicate that Erdoğan had approved the prosecutor's plan to make the arrests before the August 1-4 meeting of the Supreme Military Council (*Yüksek Askerî Şûra*, YAŞ) and to possibly launch a massive purge of the ranks during the Council.<sup>449</sup> Whatever the final truth, immediately after the events, the government and its supporters quickly blamed the coup attempt on FETÖ. The Turkish National Security Council, Erdoğan and his government asserted that Gülenists, embedded within the military, judiciary, and civil service, had orchestrated the coup as part of a long-term plan to seize power and/or eliminate the government and Erdoğan himself.<sup>450</sup> Although Gülen denied all involvement and condemned the coup attempt<sup>451</sup>, the evidence linking the coup to his movement includes the profiles of many of the officers involved.<sup>452</sup> A significant number of those implicated had been promoted during the purges that followed the Balyoz and Ergenekon trials, which targeted secularist elements within the military<sup>453</sup> and were believed to have been orchestrated by Gülenists within the judiciary and police.<sup>454</sup> Despite these links, the extent of Gülenist involvement remains

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<sup>447</sup> The coup, which unfolded with surprising speed and coordination, was initiated with synchronized air and ground assaults in Istanbul and Ankara. It included a commando raid aimed at capturing or assassinating Erdoğan, who was on vacation in the coastal town of Marmaris. They closed the Bosphorus bridges in Istanbul and opened fire on civilians who, following Erdoğan's urgent call via a televised video message, took to the streets to confront the coup plotters.

<sup>448</sup> Conversation with a Turkish official. Interview with a news correspondent in Ankara.

<sup>449</sup> Gurcan, M. (2017, July 17). Why Turkey's Coup Didn't Stand a Chance? *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>450</sup> For Turkish leaders, there was no doubt that the whole coup had been orchestrated by the Gülenists to "vindicate" their struggles with Erdoğan. See Yavuz, M. H., & Koç, R. (2016). The Turkish Coup Attempt: The Gülen Movement vs. the State. *Middle East Policy*, 23(4), 136–148.

<sup>451</sup> "As someone who suffered under multiple military coups during the past five decades, it is especially insulting to be accused of having any link to such an attempt. I categorically deny such accusations. Government should be won through a process of free and fair elections, not force." Quoted in Martin, 2022, 22.

<sup>452</sup> "Işık Koşaner, former chief of general staff, argued that was the case. *Hürriyet*. (2016, October 26). *Işık Koşaner neden istifa ettiğini açıkladı*; See also Filkins, D. (2016, October 17). Turkey's Thirty-year Coup, Did an Exiled Cleric Try to Overthrow Erdoğan's Government. *The New Yorker*.

<sup>453</sup> An army within the army had emerged in consequence, as the columnist Kadri Gürsel put it. Gürsel, K. (2016, July 22). Turkey's Failed Coup Reveals 'Army within an Army'. *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>454</sup> As Yaprak Gürsoy observed, "among the 46 names that were promoted from colonel to brigadier admiral in the navy between 2010 and 2015, 23 of them were implicated in the putsch. [...] A similar situation also occurred in the air force." Such patterns suggest that these promotions might have benefited affiliates of the Gülen movement, known for its influence within the police and the judiciary.

contested. While many believe that Gülenists were the principal architects of the coup, others suggest that the attempt was a product of multiple factions, including Kemalists, opportunists, and various dissatisfied groups united only by their opposition to Erdoğan. As some analysts have argued,

it appears that their involvement, which to a certain extent is undeniable would not have sufficed to orchestrate the whole scope of the action [since] there are many groups, political organizations and military instances which might have undertaken the coup to stop the authoritarian drift of which they were the victims.<sup>455</sup>

This interpretation aligns with the observation that the plotters named themselves the “Peace at Home Council,” a direct reference to Atatürk, suggesting that the coup included a mix of ideologies. Metin Gürcan, an analyst with a military background, likened the coup to a “train where a number of different carriages are attached to the engine pulling the whole thing,” underscoring the possibility of a coalition of disparate groups with diverse motives.<sup>456</sup>

Regardless of the internal dynamics, the coup attempt failed for several key reasons. First, the plotters did not capture or kill Erdoğan, who was able to mobilize his supporters through a televised appeal. The failure to neutralize Erdoğan, coupled with the support he drew from the loyal military units, the police, MİT, and the Diyanet, not to mention the mobilization of AKP’s grassroots.<sup>457</sup> Second, the coup lacked sufficient support within the military hierarchy.<sup>458</sup> While many mid-level officers participated, the top brass remained largely loyal to the government. In contrast to previous military coups, which were often framed as protecting Turkey’s secularist and nationalist values, the 2016 attempt was seen as an effort by a faction within the military, possibly influenced by religious motivations, to overthrow Erdoğan’s government. In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup, the government declared a state of emergency on July 20, 2016, which lasted until July 2018, allowing the executive to rule by decree and bypass the Grand National Assembly.<sup>459</sup> This enabled Erdoğan to

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See Gürsoy, Y. (2019). The 15 July 2016 Failed Coup and the Security Sector. In A. Özerdem & M. Whiting, *The Routledge handbook of Turkish politics*. Routledge, 286.

<sup>455</sup> Balci, 2023, 517. Balci also notes that “the Gülenist power to infiltrate the army remained limited but we know nevertheless that officers of middling rank and sympathizers of the movement had succeeded in surmounting army vigilance and established themselves within army structures. They certainly participated in the coup where several groups with diverse and varied political ideologies were associated, from the Kemalist old guard to Eurasians, in other words from army circles and Turkish bureaucracy known for its anti-western attitude and its preference for strong powers like Russia and China, or even simple opportunists attracted by power”. See also, Waldman Çalışkan, 2016, 40.

<sup>456</sup> Gürcan called it a “WhatsApp coup,” after the smartphone application used by the putschists to communicate with one another. Gürcan, M. (2017). Never Again! But How? State and Military after the 15 July Coup. *Istanbul Policy Center*.

<sup>457</sup> Many Turkish citizens defied a military curfew and took to the streets at the behest of Erdoğan after he appeared on the national news program by video link on his phone. See the Footage of the call here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXfdMxRU-kg>. See also Waldman & Caliskan 2016, 40.

<sup>458</sup> Gürcan, 2017.

<sup>459</sup> The lifting of the state of emergency coincided with the passage of anti-terror legislation (Law 7145 from 25 July 2018) empowering the authorities to detain individuals without pressing charges for up to 4 days, as well as to impose lockdowns at the local level over 15 days. Criticized for extending the state of emergency beyond its expiry date, the provisions of this law also allow for the dismissal of military personnel and public servants.

aggressively crack down on Gülenists and other perceived opponents.<sup>460</sup> As already noted, the crackdown extended beyond Turkey's borders. The government sought the extradition of alleged Gülenists from several countries and pressured others, such as Germany and Brazil, to comply with its demands. Turkish diplomacy was mobilized to close Gülenist schools and institutions abroad, seize their assets, and expel their personnel. Countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and several in Africa complied, prioritizing their political and economic relations with Turkey over the benefits of the Gülenist educational network. Diplomatic relations between Turkey and its Western allies became strained as Ankara demanded the extradition of Gülenists and accused countries like Germany and the US of supporting terrorism when they refused.<sup>461</sup>

More importantly, the failed coup also had significant consequences for Turkey's political milieu. The failed coup attempt also revealed a shift in Turkish society's expectations regarding military interventions. In contrast to previous coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and the 1997 "postmodern coup," which had involved senior military officers and claimed to protect secularism, the July 2016 coup attempt was led primarily by mid-level officers and bore the marks of a fractured military. The deep divisions and factionalism within the TSK, exacerbated by the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, had weakened the military's hierarchical structure, leaving it vulnerable to infiltration and divided loyalties. While there was initially strong public support for the government's crackdown on Gülenists, over time, "many Turks began to view the purges as a broader effort by Erdoğan to consolidate power and suppress dissent."<sup>462</sup> Critics argue that Erdoğan and the AKP used the coup attempt as a pretext to eliminate political rivals and centralize authority. The state of emergency laws allowed the government to target not only those accused of being Gülenists but also other opposition groups, human rights activists, journalists, and even civil society organizations.

All in all, this situation provided Erdoğan with the pretext to dismantle any remaining checks on his authority. The state of emergency facilitated the passage of a constitutional referendum in April 2017 that transformed Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system, concentrating power in Erdoğan's hands. By the June 2018 elections, Erdoğan had further solidified his grip on power, exploiting the enhanced executive powers granted under the new constitutional framework.

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<sup>460</sup> By July 2017, the government had seized assets worth \$11 billion from around 1,000 companies linked to the movement. Over 150,000 people were dismissed from their jobs, including approximately 110,000 government officials, military personnel, and educators. The purges affected the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, and the Security General Directorate most severely. More than 78,000 people were arrested, with many still awaiting trial as of early 2018. For other numbers on the purges, see the figures collected by independent websites whose numbers include data from Başbakanlık. (2018, July 1). *T.C. Resmi Gazete*. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2018/07/20180701.pdf> and European Commission. (2018). *Turkey 2018 Report*.

<sup>461</sup> Martin, 2022; Balci, 2022.

<sup>462</sup> Interview with a civil society member.

Mehmet Uçum, a presidential advisor, contended that Turkey was on the cusp of radical transformation “just as much as 1789 influenced France and just as the Bolshevik revolution influenced Russia.”<sup>463</sup> As Neack reminds us, through a mobilization strategy “leaders put their own supporters on the streets (sometimes literally) in defense of the nation as defined by the leaders. A mobilized people march in defense of something.”<sup>464</sup> Indeed, the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, provided a critical moment for the AKP and Erdoğan not only to consolidate their power and reshape Turkey’s political setting but also to shift the “national narrative.” In the wake of the events, the AKP moved swiftly to frame it as “a national trauma orchestrated by external forces” and “as an existential threat to Turkey’s sovereignty and stability.”<sup>465</sup> The narrative constructed by the government was one of heroic resistance: the Turkish people, led by Erdoğan, stood up against the traitorous elements within the state. The mastermind (*üst akıl*) discourse, which had already been introduced in 2014 by AKP elites, has been frequently used by pro-government agencies and news outlets to legitimize the AKP’s political moves, delegitimize dissident views, and endorse a new nationalistic agenda in the post-attempted coup era.<sup>466</sup> As such, the coup became a “means for the AKP to mobilize its grassroots” and forge “an emotionally charged myth of national unity in the face of peril.”<sup>467</sup> This framing served several purposes. First, it bolstered Erdoğan’s image as the indispensable leader who had saved Turkey from chaos. Second, it created a narrative of victimhood and resilience that resonated across political fault lines, allowing the AKP to reach beyond its core base and appeal to nationalist sentiments more broadly. The government’s narrative omitted the possible involvement of other factions within the military and the bureaucracy. The AKP also utilized this narrative to promote an anti-Western stance, feeding into existing suspicions about foreign involvement in Turkey’s domestic affairs, further amplifying nationalist and anti-American sentiments.<sup>468</sup>

While the AKP used the coup attempt to forge new political alliances and consolidate its hold on power, a key development in this regard was the rapprochement – under the Yenikapı spirit

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<sup>463</sup> Quoted in Sozen Usluer, A. (2016, July 22). The legacy of the coup attempt in Turkey. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/7/22/the-legacy-of-the-coup-attempt-in-turkey>.

<sup>464</sup> Neack, L. (2019). *Studying foreign policy comparatively: Cases and analysis* (Fourth Edition). Rowman & Littlefield, 106.

<sup>465</sup> Adisonmez & Onursal, 2020.

<sup>466</sup> Karaosmanoğlu, 2021.

<sup>467</sup> Bechev, 2022, 154. See the next section on the individual level for further details on the politicization and emotional attachment.

<sup>468</sup> İbrahim Karagül, editor-in-chief of the pro-government daily *Yeni Şafak*, accused the US government and military of masterminding the plot – or even taking direct part in the putsch on the night of 15–16 July. The AKP faithful pointed to the American forces stationed in the İncirlik airbase. The claim was repeated by high-placed dignitaries such as Süleyman Soylu, who took over the interior ministry at the end of August 2016. Proponents included the Eurasianists and their mouthpiece *Aydınlık*. One-time AKP detractors like Doğu Perinçek, imprisoned as a result of the Ergenekon trial, wholeheartedly embraced Erdoğan. To conspiracy theorists, Fethullah Gülen’s residence in the US provided the ultimate proof that Washington was behind the attempt to topple Erdoğan. See them in Taş, H. (2018). The 15 July abortive coup and post-truth politics in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(1), 1–19.



(*Yenikapı ruhu*) – with the ultranationalist MHP led by Devlet Bahçeli.<sup>469</sup> The party, facing internal challenges and declining electoral support, saw an opportunity to align with Erdoğan in exchange for influence over the government's nationalist agenda.<sup>470</sup> In turn, Bahçeli's support was crucial for the AKP to secure the parliamentary votes needed to propose constitutional amendments for an executive Presidency.<sup>471</sup> As such, the coup thus served not only as a pretext for authoritarian consolidation but also as a catalyst for institutional changes that would culminate in the 2017 constitutional referendum and the establishment of an executive Presidency.

These rapid shifts within the internal level provided the political context in which Erdoğan could push forward his long-standing ambition to establish an executive Presidency. In the months following the coup, the AKP swiftly prepared a draft of constitutional amendments aimed at fundamentally altering Turkey's political system. The proposed changes included abolishing the Prime Minister's office, granting the President the power to issue decrees, appoint ministers and judges, and dissolve Parliament. These changes would centralize executive authority in the hands of the President, effectively sidelining other branches of government. In January 2017, Bahçeli formally announced the MHP's support for the proposed amendments, effectively sealing the fate of Turkey's parliamentary system.<sup>472</sup> The constitutional referendum was held on April 16, 2017, in a highly polarized environment. The campaign was marked by widespread allegations of media bias, state intimidation, and irregularities, including the controversial acceptance of unstamped ballots by the Supreme Electoral Council. Despite these irregularities and a narrow margin – 51.4% in favor of the amendments versus 48.6% against – the referendum passed, enabling Erdoğan to claim a mandate for the new presidential system. The new constitutional order dramatically shifted the balance of power, establishing an all-powerful Presidency. Under the new system, Erdoğan gained the authority to govern by decree, appoint and dismiss ministers and judges, and dissolve Parliament without the checks and balances typical of democratic systems. Pro-government commentators likened these changes to the US presidential system<sup>473</sup>, but critics pointed out the critical difference: Turkey's lack

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<sup>469</sup> Named after a pro-government rally attended by up to 5 million people in Istanbul's Yenikapı district on August 7, 2016, the Yenikapı consensus describes an informal multi-party agreement among the AKP, the MHP, and the CHP to set political differences aside in favor of national unity and protecting democracy from common threats. See Hürriyet. (2016, August 5). *Millions Stand for Democracy in Turkey*.

<sup>470</sup> What certainly helped Bahçeli to change tack was the support he received from the government in defeating a challenge by Meral Akşener and Sinan Oğan for the leadership of the MHP in the summer and autumn of 2016. Kuru, S. (2021). The Institutional Structure of "New Turkey". *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 20.

<sup>471</sup> An observer told the author: "At the time, Erdoğan found that fueling nationalism was the perfect political tactic, [enabling him to broaden his support base] by appealing to nationalist and conservative voters, including those who usually aligned with the MHP."

<sup>472</sup> MHP leader Bahçeli announced his support for a strong executive Presidency on the condition that the first four articles of the existing Constitution (which reaffirm secularism and Kemalist nationalism) remain intact. Esen, B., & Gümüşçü, Ş. (2017). A Small Yes for Presidentialism: The Turkish Constitutional Referendum of April 2017. *South European Society and Politics*, 22(3), 303–326.

<sup>473</sup> Miş, N., & Duran, B. (Eds.). (2018). Turkey's presidential system: Model and practices. SETA.

of an independent judiciary, a robust civil society, or a free press.<sup>474</sup> At the same time, the referendum exposed deep societal divisions. With nearly half the electorate voting against the constitutional changes, the result reflected a polarized society. As an internal observer put it, “The results were more the reflection of a plebiscite on the strong leader and a proof of loyalty [as] we [Turkish people] did not choose the best regime model but which personality represented our feelings for the country.”<sup>475</sup> The CHP-led opposition criticized the new system as a move towards autocracy. Public opinion was split, and allegations of voter manipulation and irregularities during the referendum process further undermined its legitimacy. Despite these concerns, the new presidential system was implemented, signaling the end of parliamentary governance in Turkey and the beginning of a new era characterized by the centralization of power in the executive branch. This new structure fits the model of “competitive authoritarianism,” where democratic institutions exist but are manipulated to ensure the ruling party’s dominance.<sup>476</sup> Berk Esen and Sebnem Gümüşçü similarly describe Turkey’s post-referendum regime as one where democratic procedures mask an underlying autocratic reality. Despite these rifts within the AKP, the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt has put the party in a much more comfortable position over any opposition, including legally and politically. In such a context, Parliament is no longer functioning as an effective overseer of the government, and opposition parties have been largely neutralized.<sup>477</sup> The CHP, the second-largest party in Parliament, had been marginalized in the political discourse in recent years, in large measure, by a nearly constant media presence of government officials and the President. Representatives of both the CHP and pro-Kurdish parties have come under legal attack, particularly since the AKP won approval of constitutional amendments in 2016 to lift immunity for more than one-third of the members of Parliament.<sup>478</sup>

However, over the subsequent electoral cycles, the opposition proved its ability to cope with its numerous disadvantages and adapt – and effectively begin to challenge – the AKP and its People’s Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*) with the MHP. In both the June 2018 parliamentary elections and the March 2019 local elections, the CHP and Meral Akşener’s İYİ Party formalized their coalition as the Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*).<sup>479</sup> Additionally, the CHP sought to broaden its appeal by reaching out also to religiously inclined and conservative voters disillusioned by the country’s economic

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<sup>474</sup> For an outline of the amendments, see Koru, 2021.

<sup>475</sup> Interview.

<sup>476</sup> Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2002). Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 51–65.

<sup>477</sup> Esen & Gumuscu, 2016.

<sup>478</sup> The amendment was carefully crafted to apply only to charges that prosecutors sought to file while the bill was being drafted. It is not retroactive, thereby exempting AKP legislators implicated in the 2013 corruption scandal. *Idem*.

<sup>479</sup> While also establishing an unofficial alliance with the HDP, they were joined by the Felicity Party, a faction that had splintered from the AKP’s origins under Necmettin Erbakan, and the small center-right Democratic Party, a successor to the True Path Party of Demirel and Çiller.

slowdown.<sup>480</sup> This strategy had mixed success. Although the opposition could not force a runoff in the 2018 presidential election<sup>481</sup>, the AKP lost nearly 7% of the votes, leaving it without a majority in the Grand National Assembly and increasingly reliant on its alliance with the MHP. This left open the possibility that the opposition could gain control of the legislature in future elections and exert pressure on the Presidency. The opposition's gains were even more pronounced in the turbulent 2019 local elections. The “anti-Erdogan” coalition led by the CHP saw Ekrem İmamoğlu secure a decisive victory in Istanbul<sup>482</sup> and its other candidates retaining control of many of Turkey’s largest cities. The opposition’s improved cohesion, its new conciliatory rhetoric, and Turkey’s economic downturn

contributed to demobilizing Erdoğan's base and influencing the election results. These outcomes showed that, despite the transition to a presidential system, the competitive nature of Turkish politics was not entirely lost.<sup>483</sup>

The emergence of two new breakaway parties from the AKP – Ahmet Davutoğlu’s Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*) and Ali Babacan’s (Deva Partisi), associated with Abdullah Gül – further indicated that political space remained open for challengers who were betting on Erdoğan’s declining popularity. However, despite these setbacks and growing public dissatisfaction with the presidential regime, Turkey’s new political order enabled the AKP-MHP duo to maintain a solid grip on the state. For instance, from August 2019, the government replaced elected pro-Kurdish HDP mayors in southeastern cities with state-appointed trustees (*kayyumlar*), while on March 17, 2021, prosecutors filed a case with the Constitutional Court seeking to dissolve the party, “a tactic reminiscent of the repressive measures from Turkey’s past.”<sup>484</sup> Additionally, attacks on Kurds, leftists, and other minority groups suggest that Erdoğan had begun attempting “to reignite old cultural conflicts through a nativist and nationalistic rhetoric to divide the opposition coalition.”<sup>485</sup> Yet, the economy’s lackluster performance – including a recession in late 2018 and the severe impact of the COVID-19

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<sup>480</sup> Undermined the AKP’s reputation for sound economic management, with average GDP growth rates plummeting to 3.2 % after 2013. For example, Muharrem İnce, the party’s presidential candidate in 2018, adopted a more populist style similar to Erdoğan’s and made explicit references to Islam. Ekrem İmamoğlu, the CHP candidate for the Istanbul mayoralty, employed a similar approach during his 2019 campaign, including attending Friday prayers and promoting a message of “radical love” with the slogan “Everything will be very nice” (Hersey çok güzel olacak). See Yavuzylmaz, H. (2021). When local becomes general: Turkey’s 31 March 2019 elections and its implications for dynamics of polarization and sustainability of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23(4), 622–642.

<sup>481</sup> Where Erdoğan won in the first round, retaining almost the same percentage of the vote he achieved in 2014 and the constitutional referendum.

<sup>482</sup> narrowly win the Istanbul mayoral race against Binali Yıldırım by a margin of just 13,729 votes, or 0.17 %. When the Supreme Electoral Council annulled these results under Erdoğan's pressure and scheduled a rerun for June 23, İmamoğlu. Meanwhile, Mansur Yavaş defeated Mehmet Özhaseki in the race for Ankara's mayoralty, ending the AKP's long-standing dominance in the capital that had persisted since the Refah Party's victory in 1994.

<sup>483</sup> Interview with Turkish political strategist.

<sup>484</sup> Interview with Turkish MP.

<sup>485</sup> Idem.

pandemic in 2020–2021<sup>486</sup> – began challenging the regime’s efforts to maintain broader appeal beyond its core AKP supporters.<sup>487</sup> Moreover, scandals such as the revelations by organized crime figure Sedat Peker in 2021, which exposed high-level corruption and cronyism, have further eroded public confidence in the government. However, as an internal observer noted,

While these challenges might have had the potential to be accompanied by domestic liberalization, Erdoğan has intensified repression to maintain stability and his hold on power, a strategy typical of authoritarian leaders facing declining electoral legitimacy. So, Turkey further embarked on the path toward full authoritarian consolidation.<sup>488</sup>

This trend was confirmed in the last May 2023 Presidential elections, where the AKP-MPH alliance proved strong “authoritarian resilience” by securing another term in office until 2028.<sup>489</sup> Indeed, despite economic hardships<sup>490</sup>, the social, moral, and financial destruction caused by massive earthquakes earlier in the year<sup>491</sup>, and an apparent united “anti-Erdogan” opposition, the incumbents replicated similar instruments and tactics to precedent elections such that Erdoğan could win the presidential race with 52% of the votes.<sup>492</sup>

#### **7.2.2.2. The Presidential System and the Impact on Foreign Policy-Making**

The establishment of a new political order after the coup attempt also had profound effects on the direction of TFP. The narrative created in the wake of the coup, combined with constitutional

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<sup>486</sup> Turkey’s GDP expanded by 1.8 per cent in 2020, impressive in comparison to other large economies, but still insufficient to reverse the low-growth trend. Yavuzylmaz, 2021; Yavuzylmaz, H. (2021). When local becomes general: Turkey’s 31 March 2019 elections and its implications for dynamics of polarization and sustainability of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23(4), 622–642.

<sup>487</sup> As this thesis was conceptualized within and with a limited temporal frame, more recent dynamics from 2022 onwards will be briefly analyzed in the conclusions.

<sup>488</sup> Interview. See also Çalışkan, K. (2018). Toward a new political regime in Turkey: From competitive toward full authoritarianism. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 58, 5–33.

<sup>489</sup> Esen, B., Gumuscu, S., & Yavuzylmaz, H. (2024). Competitive yet unfair: May 2023 elections and authoritarian resilience in Turkey. *South European Society and Politics*, 1–29.

<sup>490</sup> Ugur-Cinar, M. (2023). Elections and Democracy in Turkey: Reconsidering Competitive Authoritarianism in the Age of Democratic Backsliding. *The Political Quarterly*, 94(3), 445–451.

<sup>491</sup> Officially speaking, more than 50,000 people lost their lives, and a large number of people migrated to other cities. Both during the initial rescue processes and months after, inadequate crisis preparedness and planning for such disasters and late and inadequate help to the earthquake-struck cities raised criticisms. For details on the catastrophe, see Aksoy, H. A., & Çevik, S. (2023). Political and economic implications of the Turkish earthquakes: Centralisation of power has eroded state capacity. *SWP Comment*.

<sup>492</sup> Some more details will be provided in the conclusive remarks of the thesis, together with an overview on the 2024 local elections. The choice of not further analyzing this election in this section stems from the fact that, despite the mediating role played by Turkey in the Ukrainian war and recurrent rhetoric of grandeur for the Republic century, foreign policy issues did not seem to play a great role in the electoral preferences compared to ideological and political polarization and economic and social grievances. Some “suspect that a major factor that seemed to have played a significant role in determining the party preferences of the voters at the polls was the partisan affiliation of the voters.” Kocapinar, G., & Kalaycioğlu, E. (2024). Elections and partisanship: Analyzing the results of the 2023 general elections in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2. Others see economic reasons, Aytaç, S. E. (2024). Economic voting in the 2023 Turkish general election. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 1–19. while others consider the fragility of the opposition, Baruh, L., & Çarkoğlu, A. (2024). Difficult choices: Choosing the candidate of the nation alliance in the 2023 Turkish presidential election. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 1–23.

changes, paved the way for a more forceful and allegedly independent foreign policy. The government's position grew increasingly anti-Western, influenced by both strategic objectives and domestic political considerations. An example of this shift was Erdoğan's decision to purchase the S-400 air defense system from Russia, defying objections from NATO allies and risking US sanctions. This move was presented domestically as a bold assertion of Turkey's sovereignty and a break from Western dependence. Similarly, Turkey's military actions in Syria, particularly cross-border operations targeting ISIS and Kurdish groups, reflected a more aggressive posture that was justified as essential for national security but also functioned to stir nationalist fervor and distract public opinion from domestic issues like economic problems and political dissent. In this matter, the AKP-MHP alliance reinforced this approach, with both parties advocating a hardline stance on national security and supporting confrontational foreign policies. Moreover, the government began to adopt a more hardline stance on issues such as the Kurdish question, the fight against the PKK, and Turkey's military interventions in Syria. The rhetoric – encapsulated in the motto “*yerli ve milli*” (local and national) – increasingly emphasized Turkey's independence and strength in the face of foreign conspiracies, reflecting a shift towards a more aggressive and isolationist foreign policy. Although the military's role as a guardian of Turkey's political status quo diminished, especially following the failed July 15, 2016, coup attempt, it regained public support through its operations in northern Syria and Iraq, indicating the possibility of a stronger coordination between the political and military leadership.<sup>493</sup> In other words, the AKP's new strategic partnership with the ultranationalists served a dual purpose: maintaining political power and building a coalition to counter domestic challenges. This partnership secured MHP support for the AKP's foreign policy agenda and solidified its authority on domestic matters. For example, a series of confrontations between Turkish and Greek warplanes in April 2018, just before the snap elections in June, was part of this strategy. The longstanding rivalry between Greece and the Republic of Cyprus was frequently used to heighten tensions, rally nationalist support, and divert public attention from internal problems. The AKP continued manipulating foreign policy to stoke nationalist sentiment and manage domestic opposition, particularly before elections or when its approval ratings declined. During this period of heightened tensions with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, Bahçeli and Erdoğan proposed to hold the parliamentary and presidential elections on the same day, from November 2019 to June 24, 2018. Despite failing to secure the required 300-seat majority, the AKP's alliance with the MHP allowed them to gain 342 out of 600 seats. Interestingly, “the new presidential system had been designed to minimize coalition formation and prevent a return to the political instability of past coalition

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<sup>493</sup> Tol, G., & Taşpınar, Ö. (2017, October). Erdoğan's Turn to the Kemalists. *Foreign Affairs*.

governments.”<sup>494</sup> However, the AKP’s failure to achieve an outright majority in the new system’s first election meant it had to continue its cooperation with the MHP. As Hale notes, under the new presidential system, the AKP adopted a “log-rolling approach” – as in the American presidential system when the President lacks a majority in Congress – requiring compromise and negotiation to maintain its parliamentary majority.<sup>495</sup> In this way, however, the AKP gained MHP’s support “but became increasingly dependent on it after the June 2018 elections.”<sup>496</sup> In addition to mobilization strategies, the AKP also employed insulation and accommodation tactics to manage its relationship with the MHP. This partnership, rooted in nationalism, relies on creating external conflicts and engaging in military actions abroad, akin to a “forever war” where ongoing conflicts serve to keep domestic issues in the background. This recalls an “insulation strategy with a twist,” where political elites create external distractions to protect themselves from domestic critics and popular demands.<sup>497</sup> In other words, because the AKP needed its support to pass legislation, the MHP wielded greater influence in Turkish politics and is enabled to actively shape the country’s foreign policy agenda. In this regard, it is essential to analyze how the new institutional setting favored changes in Turkish Foreign Policy circles as well as in military and security apparatuses.

### ***7.2.2.3. Concentration of Executive Power and the Impact on Foreign Policy Decision-Making***

The transformation of Turkey’s political system from a parliamentary to a “strong” presidential model has significantly concentrated executive power within the “Presidential Palace.”<sup>498</sup> In theory, within the new Turkish institutional system, FP decisions should be taken by a multiplicity of entities coordinated among each other by an extensive set of consultative structures and mechanisms. At the top of these structures, there is the President of the Republic, who is the main authority in foreign policy decision-making.<sup>499</sup> The consultative roles belong to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), the Turkish Army in a role of external influence but also to the newly established Security and Foreign Policy Council of the Presidency, the National Security Council, the formally appointed advisors of the President and the various

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<sup>494</sup> Interview

<sup>495</sup> Hale, 2023.

<sup>496</sup> Interview with former diplomat and MP.

<sup>497</sup> Neack, 2019, 114.

<sup>498</sup> This was stressed in many interviews.

<sup>499</sup> Miş & Duran, 2018; Koru, 2021.

connections of the President outside the Presidency (so-called informal advisors).<sup>500</sup> Under this new system, foreign policy decisions are officially intended to involve a range of entities coordinated through a network of consultative structures. However, with the increasing role of the last three, decision-making authority has moved away from the cabinet and other government institutions and has become centralized in the hands of President Erdoğan and his close circle of advisors.<sup>501</sup> This centralization of power has profoundly impacted foreign policy, as it has “marginalized traditionally central state institutions like the MFA and the MGK, reducing their roles to implementing policies and managing day-to-day foreign relations.”<sup>502</sup> In other words, although from an institutional point of view, “the Turkish structure evokes the political process model or the inter-branch politics one, in essence, Turkey’s current foreign policy decision-making process is more like the leader-dominant model.”<sup>503</sup> The institutional realignment “has allowed President Erdoğan to give his imprint, both formal and substantial, to foreign policy,” effectively sidelining the MFA and MGK from their historical roles as agenda-setters in foreign policy.

The MFA has seen a notable decline in its influence since Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu took over as Foreign Minister in 2014. During Ahmet Davutoğlu’s tenure as Prime Minister (2014-2016), the office of the Prime Minister had become the primary center of gravity for TFP. However, after Davutoğlu was ousted in May 2016 in a power struggle with Erdoğan and replaced by Binali Yıldırım, the epicenter of foreign policymaking shifted to the Presidential Office. This shift concentrated power in the hands of Erdoğan’s closest and most loyal advisers, such as İbrahim Kalın and Berat Albayrak.<sup>504</sup> Simultaneously, the MFA has also been significantly affected by the extensive purges of alleged Gülenists from its ranks. Up to 2019, between 394 and 671 career diplomats and up to 200 technical and administrative personnel were dismissed, representing almost one-third of the Ministry’s diplomatic staff. Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been weakened by a significant reduction in its professional diplomatic cadre.<sup>505</sup> While this was justified “under the state of emergency,” it also seems to be in line with Erdoğan’s tendency to stigmatize the traditional diplomats as an elite group.<sup>506</sup> Second, legal changes further politicized the MFA to sideline the

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<sup>500</sup> Neset, S., & Strand, A. (2019). *Turkish foreign policy: Structures and decision-making processes* (3; CMI Report). Chr. Michelsen Institute.

<sup>501</sup> As of early 2023, this included the Minister of National Defense, Hulusi Akar; the Head of National Intelligence, Hakan Fidan; and Special Advisor to the President, İbrahim Kalın. See the following sections for the latest changes as of fall 2024.

<sup>502</sup> Interview with former diplomat.

<sup>503</sup> Donelli, 2020.

<sup>504</sup> Albayrak, Erdoğan’s son-in-law, who has held various key positions including Minister of Treasury and Finance and previously Energy Minister, has been a rising figure in the cabinet since 2015 and was even considered for the Prime Minister’s role after Davutoğlu’s removal.

<sup>505</sup> Reported by Flanagan et al., 2020, 69. See also Ülgen, 2018.

<sup>506</sup> As Ozadmar and Yanik note Erdogas frequently called them “by the French nickname “mon cher” insinuating their perceived aloofness and detachment from the rest of the society. Erdoğan never hid his disdain for the country’s career diplomats. Over two decades in power, Erdoğan has eroded the image of foreign ministry diplomats into a westernized elite with little interest in or

cadres appointed in the pre-AKP period, allowing political appointees (and loyalties) to be nominated as ambassadors representing the government. As of late 2022, 26 of the ambassadors within the Turkish MFA were not career diplomats, accounting for 15% of all ambassadorial appointments.<sup>507</sup> These appointees included postings to significant capitals, as demonstrated by the nomination as Turkey's ambassador to Washington (2020) of Murat Mercam, who is a known Islamist figure and rose to prominence alongside Erdoğan.<sup>508</sup> When faced with criticism over appointing non-career diplomats, former Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu defended the practice, stating, “with all due respect, the best, the most successful ambassadors we have are the ones who are appointed externally,” and claimed that he had “brought justice to the Ministry.”<sup>509</sup> However, according to Semih Idiz, these appointments have “enabl[ed] nepotism, cronyism and sycophancy with a huge disregard for impartiality and expertise.”<sup>510</sup>

Finally, the restructuring of the MFA coincided with the strengthening of existing – or the creation of new – auxiliary institutions involved in foreign policy, such as TİKA, Yunus Emre Institute, the Dyanet, the Office of Public Diplomacy, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), and the Maarif Foundation under more direct control of the Presidency. This bureaucratic expansion, driven by politicization, not only permitted hiring and appointing party loyalists but also allowed Erdoğan to circumvent traditional diplomatic procedures and directly oversee TFP. Additionally, this expansion included a significant increase in Turkey's global diplomatic presence, with 31 new embassies opened only in Africa between 2009 and 2021. Yet, for some, this has led to an overstretch in Turkey's embassies abroad and a shift in the Ministry's orientation, with many positions now occupied by MHP partisans and Eurasianists who are skeptical of the West and favor closer ties with Russia and Middle Eastern neighbors.”<sup>511</sup> With all these changes, Reuben Silverman argues that the Turkish MFA “has become an adjunct to policymaking rather than a driver of it.”<sup>512</sup>

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knowledge of Turkey, justifying his politicization, personalization and centralization of foreign policy decision-making.” Özdamar, Ö., & Yanık, L. K. (2024). Populist hyperpersonalization and politicization of foreign policy institutions. *International Affairs*, 100(5), 1850.

<sup>507</sup> Hayatsever, H. (2022, May 12). Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nda bakanlık dışı atamalar artıyor. *Cumhuriyet*. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/disisleri-bakanliginda-bakanlik-disi-atamalar-artiyor-1934395>.

<sup>508</sup> Zaman, A. (2021, January 28). Erdoğan's man takes on mission impossible in Washington. *Al-Monitor*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/01/turkey-new-ambassador-washington.html>.

<sup>509</sup> Hayatsever, H. (2021, December 15). Dışişleri Bakanı Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, elçiliklerdeki siyasi atamaları savundu. *Cumhuriyet*. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/disisleri-bakani-mevlut-cavusoglu-elciliklerdeki-siyasi-atamaları-savundu-1892828>.

<sup>510</sup> Semih Idiz, “Patronage marginalizes qualified Turkish diplomats,” *Al-Monitor*, December 3, 2021. Idiz, S. (2021, December 3). Patronage marginalizes qualified Turkish diplomats. *Al-Monitor*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/patronage-marginalizes-qualified-turkish-diplomats>.

<sup>511</sup> Interview with former diplomat at the time.

<sup>512</sup> Silverman, R. (2023, January 31). The President's man: Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Turkey's changing foreign policy. *The Turkey Analyst*. <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/702the-President's-man-mevlut-cavusoglu-and-turkeys-changing-foreign-policy.html>.



In a similar fashion, the Turkish Armed Forces have undergone significant rearrangement following the 2016 coup attempt, with profound implications for foreign policy and civil-military relations. In the wake of the coup, extensive purges targeted senior officers, resulting in the dismissal or involuntary retirement of 46% of general and flag officers in the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The officer corps was reduced by approximately 20%, and 1,400 staff officers – 77% of the total – were eliminated. In addition, 16,409 cadets were dismissed from military academies, creating a significant gap in the TSK's personnel strength.<sup>513</sup> The government established the National Defense University “an umbrella body encompassing all educational institutions of the Turkish Army, to replace the closed military academies, which had been “crucial incubators of the armed forces’ distinctive culture.”<sup>514</sup> In October 2016, without consulting the military, Erdoğan appointed a head of the National Defense University; he selected Erhan Afyoncu, a historian without prior military or relevant academic experience. In addition, under the decree law, the number of contract officers who graduate from civilian universities instead of military academies has increased substantially. However, as of early 2018, the number of new officers (27,000) and noncommissioned officers (67,000) remained insufficient to restore the TSK to its pre-coup force levels.<sup>515</sup> Lastly,

The purges and military reforms appear to have adversely affected the TSK's readiness, capability, and morale, as well as civil-military relations. Informed observers report that the organizational reforms, driven by political considerations, have clouded the chain of command, increased inter-service rivalry, reduced the TSK's tactical and strategic capacity, and led to a politicization of the officer corps.<sup>516</sup>

As seen earlier, the TSK traditionally exercised considerable autonomy and was cautious about foreign deployments. However, since the coup attempt, the government has effectively sidelined the military from independent decision-making, enabling the ruling elite to use military force more freely as a tool of its assertive foreign policy.<sup>517</sup> The process had already begun with the resignation of the top military leadership in July 2011, after which Erdoğan appointed a new, more compliant military

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<sup>513</sup> Hürriyet. (2018, December 18). *Turkey Remands in Custody 118 Soldiers over Suspected FETÖ Links*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-remands-in-custody-118-soldiers-over-suspected-feto-links-139811>. The total number of military personnel dismissed grew to 16,540 by April 2019. Hürriyet. (2019, April 29). *Turkish Military Dismissed 16,540 Personnel Since Coup Attempt*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-remands-in-custody-118-soldiers-over-suspected-feto-links-139811>. Updated number based on official documents leaks, here, Nordic Monitor. (2024, July 16). *Erdogan dismissed 81 pct of top Turkish military officers following controversial coup attempt in 2016*. <https://nordicmonitor.com/2024/07/erdogan-purged-81-of-top-turkish-military-officials-following-controversial-coup-attempt-in-2016/>.

<sup>514</sup> Galetotti, M. (2016). What Turkey Can Learn from Russia About Coup-Proofing the Military;”. *War on the Rocks*.

<sup>515</sup> Hürriyet. (2018, January 2). *Turkish General Staff to Recruit over 40,000 Personnel as Compensation for Post-Coup Attempt Dismissals*. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-general-staff-to-recruit-over-40-000-personnel-as-compensation-for-post-coup-attempt-dismissals-125103>

<sup>516</sup> Reported by Flanagan et al., 2020, 70. This statement was discussed with some observers and officers, who tended to confirmed this trend.

<sup>517</sup> Kutay, A. (2020). Turkey: The Rise and Fall of the Influence of the Military in Politics. In A. Kutay, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press.

leadership.<sup>518</sup> Still, it was an emergency decree issued in July 2016<sup>519</sup> that initiated a significant overhaul of Turkish civil-military relations, placing the Land, Naval, and Air Forces under the direct control of the civilian Minister of Defense, thereby reducing the authority of the Chief of the General Staff (TGS). The military has a “subservient role in the new bureaucratic structure of security and foreign policy making and has been placed under the mandate of the Ministry of National Defense in the Presidential Cabinet.”<sup>520</sup> The President acquired direct authority to communicate with and issue orders to service commanders, effectively sidelining the traditional military hierarchy. The decree also restructured the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ), the body responsible for decisions on military promotions, retirement, and disciplinary measures, by increasing civilian representation.<sup>521</sup> For some, these changes have led to a greater degree of politicization in military promotions, aligning the officer corps more closely with Erdoğan’s political objectives. The post-coup purges have resulted in a 38% reduction in the number of generals and a sharp decline in the TSK’s operational capability, particularly in the Air Force, which now faces a shortage of trained pilots. The early promotion of officers deemed loyal to Erdoğan has resulted in the rise of “Eurasianists” within the TSK, who are generally suspicious of NATO and favor closer alliances with Russia and China.<sup>522</sup> This shift has aligned the military more closely with the government’s nationalist and interventionist foreign policy agenda. According to various researchers, most of the expelled and arrested servicemen were so-called “Atlanticists” who were attaching importance to close cooperation with the US and NATO.<sup>523</sup> Others have noted that the dismissal of pro-American and pro-NATO generals had significant consequences on Turkey-NATO relations<sup>524</sup> because they were replaced by those who had mostly conservative views and those who were imprisoned in the “Ergenekon” and “Balyoz” cases and were known for their mostly “Eurasianist” views.<sup>525</sup> For instance, US Central Command Commander General J. Votel and J. Clapper, former US Director of National Intelligence, noted that among the

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<sup>518</sup> Cook, S. A. (2011). Tarnished Brass. *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>519</sup> Keyman, E. F., & Gürçan, M. (2017). 15 Temmuz’dan On Beş Ay Sonra: Ordunun Reformu., *Devletin Dönüşümü. Istanbul Policy Center*.

<sup>520</sup> Aras, 2019, 6.

<sup>521</sup> Keyman, & Gürçan, 2017.

<sup>522</sup> Hovsepyan, L. (2022). The influence of Turkish domestic transformations on Turkish–U.S. relations: Ideology, identity, military. *Comparative Strategy*, 41(6), 572.

<sup>523</sup> Gürçan, M. (2016). Will Turkey’s military turn East or West? *Al-Monitor*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/08/turkey-what-is-next-for-military-east-westboth.html>.

<sup>524</sup> Turkish Minute. (2017). *Barkey says pro-NATO generals purged, Turkey-Alliance relations could shift*. <https://www.turkishminute.com/2017/02/06/video-barkey-says-pro-nato-general-purged-turkish-nato-relations-will-shifted/>; Çandar, C. (2016). A New Turkey? Implications of the Failed Military Coup and Subsequent Political Coup. *Horizons*, 8.

<sup>525</sup> Emmot, R. (2017, October 16). Exclusive: Turkey Purges NATO Military Envoys after Failed Coup. *Reuters*; BBC News. (2017, July 6). *Purged: The Officers Who Cannot Go Home to Turkey*. In addition, a significant number of officers serving at NATO Headquarters and abroad sought asylum in host countries, which significantly raised the beliefs inside the government about their links to the coup. The rest of the command staff in Turkey, which avoided repression, began to show their “independent military position” from NATO and the United States. Some analysts interpreted this post-coup transformation in the Turkish military as “a drastic de-NATO-isation of the armed forces. Zandee, D. (2019). CrisisAlert 1: Turkey and NATO - Living Apart Together. *Clingendael Report*.

arrested servicemen were many fellow officers who were working with the American side and with whom the American defense department collaborated. In Clapper's words, "many of our interlocutors have been purged or arrested." They also expressed concern that such a reshuffle of the security system and the purge of their Turkish military counterparts would have a negative impact on US regional policy.<sup>526</sup> At the same time, however, Bayramoğlu is convinced that the so-called "nationalist-Kemalists" still represent a solid and large group in the army, whose perceptions on important issues of foreign policy and security coincide with the policy pursued by the current authorities.<sup>527</sup> Accordingly, since the Gülen-AKP conflict erupted and the collapse of the "peace process" with the PKK, relations between some top commanders of the TSK and AKP leadership have improved substantially under a more compliant TSK leadership and following the success of the 2018 military campaign in Afrin, Syria. For example, as late as February 2016, the Turkish General Staff let it be known through the media that the TSK was opposed to the government's wish for a military intervention in Syria.<sup>528</sup> This signal was sufficient to silence the issue temporarily. The concentration of executive power in the Presidency has also allowed Erdogan to leave a direct imprint on foreign policy decisions, circumventing professional bodies in the state. This led some to argue that Turkish foreign policy has been instrumentalized for domestic purposes and serves as a vehicle for the President's personal political ambitions.<sup>529</sup> Certainly, the ideological turn towards hard-liner nationalism in government policy has reinforced the promotion of a more interventionist and security-focused FP, especially regarding regional disputes.<sup>530</sup> An example of how the current Turkish approach prioritizes domestic politics over foreign policy is visible in the decision to open military bases abroad, which helps paint a new picture of success in the domestic sphere, reinforcing the idea that Turkey's new foreign policy is alive and well.<sup>531</sup> Nonetheless, it is also important to note that while public trust in the military, previously seen as the guardian of order and the secular state, has eroded, the "reemergence of domestic and external threat" has contributed to its restoration, as in the case of the TSK's operations in 2018 against Kurdish forces in Syria's Afrin province.<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> Hovsepyan, 2022, 573. TRT. (2016). *Top US generals' coup remarks hamper relations with Turkey*. <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/top-us-generals-coup-remarks-hamper-relations-with-turkey-153311>.

<sup>527</sup> Bayramoğlu, A. (2017, January 15). Is Turkish Military's Role in Politics Over? *Al-Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/turkey-military-role-over-politics-over.html>.

<sup>528</sup> Gürsel, K. (2016, February 11). Can Erdoğan Bully Turkey's Armed Forces into Invading Syria? *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>529</sup> Author's interview with a former Turkish diplomat. Ciddi, S. (2018, April 22). Under Erdoğan, Turkey's Foreign Policy Is a One-Man Show. *Stratfor*. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/Erdoğan-turkey-foreign-policy-europe-us-one-man-show>.

<sup>530</sup> Ülgen, 2018.

<sup>531</sup> Aras & Akpınar, 2017.

<sup>532</sup> According to a poll conducted by Kadir Has University in December 2016, the military had lost its decadeslong status as the most trusted institution due to the coup attempt on July 15 of that year. In late 2015, 62.4% had named the armed forces as the most trusted institution, but in late 2016, only 47.4% agreed to this. The military came in second as the Presidency rose from 46.9% to 49.4% in the poll. Kadir Has Üniversitesi. (2017). *Türkiye Sosyal-Siyasal Eğilimler Araştırması*. <https://www.khas.edu.tr/khas-kurumsal-arastirmalar/>. See also the other updated ones, on the same webpage.

The National Intelligence Organization (MİT), despite infiltration by alleged Gülenists,<sup>533</sup> has remained highly influential in security policy under the leadership of Hakan Fidan first and Ibrahim Kalın since 2023. In November 2016, an executive decree expanded the MİT's scope by creating new departments for coordinating among state institutions and managing special operations, reflecting a shift towards a greater focus on external threats.<sup>534</sup> Additionally, this has “gradually blurred the border between the MFA and the MİT in terms of policy implementation [....and] created a symbiosis between the two corps.”<sup>535</sup> As noted by two prominent observers,

under this new hyper-personalized system, MİT has become an essential part of the foreign policy decision-making of the Erdoğan administration. President Erdoğan seems to prefer the direct, agile approach of the Secret Service in foreign policy decision-making; this frees him from diplomatic constraints and gives him room for many forms of maneuvering, including back-channel diplomacy between intelligence services.<sup>536</sup>

Ultimately, the Turkish police force, believed to be deeply infiltrated by Gülenists, has undergone extensive purges over the years. In response to the Gezi protests, the police were heavily militarized and granted expansive powers to suppress both domestic and urban dissent.<sup>537</sup> The rise in domestic terrorism in 2015 and 2016 heightened concerns over urban security, prompting new measures to address these threats. This period saw the arrest of at least 40,000 personnel, alongside an increase in counterterrorism operations and targeted attacks on its ranks, which further strained the remaining police forces.<sup>538</sup> Amid the escalation of tensions with the PKK in southeastern Turkey, provincial governors began recruiting over 2,300 “neighborhood guards” (also referred to as “city guards”) to collaborate with local police. After the failed coup attempt, these guards were deployed to western cities as well.<sup>539</sup> An October 2016 decree expanded their powers, allowing them to be equipped with heavy weaponry and providing them with a minimum salary and social security benefits.<sup>540</sup> Simultaneously, private security firms began playing a more prominent role in Turkey, employing up to 350,000 personnel and generating revenue of \$300 million in 2015. In early 2017, executive decrees authorized these private security guards to carry firearms while on duty, and local

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<sup>533</sup> In response to the coup attempt and the overall changes in the security sector, MİT discharged some 10 % of its 3,000 staff members in February 2017, mostly from the electronic and signal intelligence departments. See Gürcan, M., & Megan, E. (2017). Turkey's security sector after July 15: Democratizing security or securitizing the state? *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 15(4), 67–85.

<sup>534</sup> Idem.

<sup>535</sup> Conversation with a Turkish officer and an expert on Intelligence.

<sup>536</sup> Özdamar & Yanik, 2024, 1852. For example, after a decade of frozen diplomatic relations, in 2022, Turkish and Syrian intelligence chiefs met to discuss the Syrian civil war. Özcan, E. E. (2022). 2022'de Suriye'de Türkiye-Esed rejimi görüşmeleri, Pençe-Kılıç Harekatı ve ekonomik kriz öne çıktı. *Anadolu Ajansı*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/2022de-suriyede-turkiye-esed-rejimi-gorusmeleri-pence-kilic-harekatı-ve-ekonomik-kriz-one-cikti/2776748>.

<sup>537</sup> Eissenstat, H. (2017). The Hard Truth About Turkey's Opposition Why It Will Have Trouble Challenging Erdogan. *Foreign Affairs*, 3.

<sup>538</sup> Gürcan, M. (2017, March 6). Turkish Government Outsources Urban Security. *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>539</sup> Baysal, N. (2017, November 13). Why Turkey Is Posting Paramilitary Forces to Its Own Cities. *Ahval News*.

<sup>540</sup> Idem.

administrators were given the authority to outsource security functions to these private companies for strategic sites such as nuclear facilities, airports, and conference or sports venues. According to these decrees, if state authorities found themselves overstretched by counterterrorism and other responsibilities, they could declare certain facilities of strategic importance and then authorize the use of private security guards. Since 2016, the security sector in Turkey has become increasingly fragmented due to ongoing purges and organizational changes, which have bolstered the influence of non-military forces. Faced with a shortage of personnel and insufficient recruits from its own base, the government turned to secularist and ultranationalist factions, including military officers convicted in the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials and the Eurasianist and socialist Perincek Group. This alignment is rooted in a shared opposition to the Gülen movement, Turkish nationalism, and anti-Western sentiment. However, it also presents challenges for the government, as it complicates the political loyalty and reliability of both the police and military forces, potentially putting the AKP leadership at odds with its religious support base.<sup>541</sup>

A notable development in the rise of informal security providers is the rise of the SADAT, a military consulting and training firm. After the appointment of Adnan Tanrıverdi<sup>542</sup> in August 2016 as a military adviser to the President, the company has been labelled as “Erdogan’s private militia.”<sup>543</sup> Different analyses of presumed Erdoğan proxies observed that pseudo-military groups like SADAT “function formally as security contractor...and informally as secretive armed forces”<sup>544</sup> and that “SADAT can be considered the continuation of the pre-Erdoğan period’s ‘deep state’ informal units.”<sup>545</sup> In 2020, Tanrıverdi is believed to have signaled a greater role for SADAT in Africa when he noted Turkey’s success in signing several defense cooperation agreements with African states to train their troops.<sup>546</sup> He is also advocated for Turkey to create a private military contractor — akin to the Russian Wagner’s mercenaries — for dedicated foreign operations, capable of providing a force more useful than the Turkish military in select situations.<sup>547</sup> Understandably, Tanrıverdi’s aspirations justify concerns that Erdoğan is using SADAT as one means to export military force abroad as in the

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<sup>541</sup> Eissenstat, 2017, 4–5; Gürcan, M. (2016, October 12). Power Struggle Erupts in Turkey’s Security Structure. *Al-Monitor*.

<sup>542</sup> head of is a former one-star general who was expelled from the Turkish Army in 1996 due to concerns over his religious views.

<sup>543</sup> This is due to the Islamist views of its founder, which are no secret in the company’s manifesto. The manifesto details SADAT’s aspiration to be an alternative to the “colonist countries of crusade mentality.” Its original cadre were retired commissioned and non-commissioned officers, “who will attach primary importance to the national interests of such countries and the joint interests of the World of Islam, [and] who have the profound experience of [the Turkish Armed Forces].” In the long term, the company will “contribute to the emergence of the World of Islam as a Super power and to promote an environment of cooperation in [the] field of Defense and Defense Industry among Islamic Countries.”. See <https://www.sadat.com.tr/download/SADAT-eng-full-v02.pdf>.

<sup>544</sup> Cubukcu, S. (2018). The Rise of Paramilitary Groups in Turkey. *Small Wars Journal*.

<sup>545</sup> Yanarocak, H. E. C., & Spyer, J. (2021). Turkish Militias and Proxies. *The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security*.

<sup>546</sup> Nordic Monitor. (2020). *Turkey’s paramilitary contractor SADAT eyes training African troops via defense deals*. <https://nordicmonitor.com/2020/05/turkeys-paramilitary-contractor-sadat-aims-at-training-african-troops-with-the-help-of-defense-cooperation-agreements/>.

<sup>547</sup> Salhani, C. (2020, January 7). Erdogan opens a Pandora’s box. *The Arab Weekly*. <https://thearabweekly.com/erdogan-opens-pandoras-box>.

cases of investigations about its involvement in Turkey's strategies in the Libyan<sup>548</sup> and Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>549</sup> conflicts. Recent espionage allegations from Germany and the US suggest that SADAT cooperates with MİT to target Gülenists and PKK affiliates abroad.<sup>550</sup> Sadat's CEO allegedly admitted working with Turkish intelligence agency<sup>551</sup> and, in 2023, he also publicly voiced against the NATO membership of Sweden.<sup>552</sup> However, despite the company's ideological and strategic affinity with the government and MİT,

the performance and conduct of those mercenaries even loosely associated with SADAT could potentially result in embarrassing failures abroad, unintentional military escalation, and increased instability at home. SADAT's viability, and by extension Erdoğan's tolerance for the company, is directly linked to its success in managing these risks.<sup>553</sup>

Overall, one can safely state that Turkey's turn to a Presidential system allowed President Erdoğan's growing consolidation of power, which is characterized by his increasingly personalized and centralized rule, has permeated nearly every aspect of Turkish politics, including foreign policy. This trend emphasizes the significance of individual traits in decision-making in line with the assumption that idiosyncratic dynamics often emerge in regimes where authority is highly personalized and concentrated, particularly during periods of instability or crisis.<sup>554</sup> Under this leader-centric model, Erdoğan has leveraged foreign policy as a tool to expand and invigorate his domestic base.<sup>555</sup> This approach has been marked by a securitized stance and heightened nationalist rhetoric, which have facilitated the formation of a "new political alliance" between AKP and the ultranationalist Nationalist MHP. An unusual development within this foreign policy framework is the increasing discussion of preemptive action in Turkish media and in the public. "This government appears to be actively cultivating public support for a doctrine of preemption and cross-border operations as the primary means of countering perceived threats."<sup>556</sup> As Kardaş notes, this strategy involves the proactive use of military force beyond Turkey's borders when deemed necessary, a willingness to sidestep traditional alliances, and the pursuit of unilateral actions independent of the United States and NATO.<sup>557</sup> In a manner reminiscent of the Kemalist establishment before the AKP

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<sup>548</sup> Freeman, C. (2020, September 12). Erdogan nurtures elite mercenary force to rival Russia's Wagner Group. *The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/09/12/erdogans-private-islamic-army-turkish-pm-nurtures-elite-mercenary/>.

<sup>549</sup> Cookman, L. (2020). Syrians Make Up Turkey's Proxy Army in Nagorno-Karabakh. *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>550</sup> Zaman, A. (2017, December 20). Are Hit Squads About to Take Aim at Turkey's Dissidents Abroad. *Al-Monitor*; Eissenstat, 2017, 5–6.

<sup>551</sup> Nordic Monitor. (2021, May 2). Turkish paramilitary firm Sadat's CEO admits working with Turkish intelligence agency MİT.

<sup>552</sup> Turkish Minute. (2023, October 24). *Controversial SADAT CEO speaks against Turkey's approval of Sweden's NATO bid*. <https://turkishminute.com/2023/10/24/controversial-sadat-ceo-spoke-against-turkeys-approval-of-swedens-nato-bid/>.

<sup>553</sup> Powers, M. (2021). Making Sense of Saadat: Turkey's Private Military Company. *War on the Rocks*.

<sup>554</sup> Dawisha, 1990.

<sup>555</sup> Kesgin, 2020.

<sup>556</sup> Interview.

<sup>557</sup> Saban Kardaş quoted in Gürçan, 2016.

era, the current Ankara government has invoked rhetoric that plays on old Turkish fears of Western conspiracies to create a new regional order – akin to a modern-day version of the Sèvres Treaty<sup>558</sup> – and has emphasized perceived threats to Turkey’s territorial integrity, particularly from Kurdish ambitions.<sup>559</sup> What has been highlighted by a CMI report was confirmed in many interviews held by the author of this thesis.<sup>560</sup> For instance, while the Security and Foreign Policy Committee, as defined by Presidential Decree no. 1, is tasked with “proposing new policies, overseeing their implementation, and making macro-level decisions,” practicalities seem to contradict its purposes. The committee includes members from academia, along with professional advisors and journalists who maintain personal connections with the President. Although the President is the official chair of the committee, in practice, [İbrahim Kalın] the Chief Advisor to the President, used to function as the deputy chair. One notable aspect of the committee’s composition is that “any former or current diplomats” – individuals who might be expected to provide valuable insights on foreign policy matters – “have been gradually excluded.”<sup>561</sup> Additionally, the committee lacks a formal mechanism to communicate its recommendations to the President in an institutionalized manner. Actually, “we have been facing a process of de-institutionalization of [Turkish] foreign policy.”<sup>562</sup>

Typically, the Committee meets biweekly, although sometimes it convenes weekly. The appointed members are assigned work dossiers based on their areas of expertise and are tasked with preparing reports primarily focused on creating scenarios for potential future foreign policy developments. They also generate reports on “real-time issues.” While members have access to information from various institutions, such as the MFA and MIT, they must request this information through the Presidency and rely on the data provided by these institutions.

As one interviewee remarked, “It seems that the members of the Security and Foreign Policy Committee are currently busier with pressing foreign policy issues rather than long-term foresight.”<sup>563</sup> According to government circles,<sup>564</sup> Turkish bureaucracy had become overly influential in decision-making and policy development, overshadowing elected politicians: this required change through the establishment of the Presidential system. To address this, the President is said to assemble a team of top-level experts and executives to ensure that appointments are grounded in expertise. However, interviews appear to confirm that both senior and junior diplomats and practitioners lament that “the selections have largely been based on personal trust and loyalty rather than merit [and that this] could

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<sup>558</sup> Idem.

<sup>559</sup> Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019.

<sup>560</sup> Neset & Strand, 2019.

<sup>561</sup> Interview.

<sup>562</sup> Interview.

<sup>563</sup> Interview.

<sup>564</sup> Miş & Duran, 240-55.

undermine the effectiveness of final decisions.”<sup>565</sup> The advisors come from diverse political, academic, journalistic, and diplomatic backgrounds, but “those most frequently consulted by Erdoğan tend to have a long-standing relationship with him.”<sup>566</sup> Some have also added that bureaucrats and diplomats have become more cautious in taking initiatives and refrain from being “pro-active as diplomatic corps used to be on many fronts.” Now, the new presidential government system seems to have created an overlap between their [Presidential office] responsibilities and the MFA’s role.”<sup>567</sup>

### **7.2.3. Foreign Policy for Domestic Consumption: the End of the Peace Process with the Kurds<sup>568</sup>**

While the AKP’s government tried to reshape the imaginary of the Kurdish question in the early 2010s, “the opposition between dominant Turkish and Kurdish narratives, which perceived Kurdish progress as a threat and Turkish oppression as given, largely remained intact as the root causes of the Turkish-Kurdish problem were not fully addressed, and this rendered the process vulnerable to unforeseen developments in Syria and Iraq.”<sup>569</sup> The continued formation of an autonomous Kurdish territory in Northern Syria in January 2014 heightened Turkey’s concerns about potential territorial fragmentation. As Resch clearly explained, the conflictual relations between the PKK and the Turkish government have been shaped by Turkey’s fear of the Kurdish regions splitting away. Even though the PKK repeatedly declared that it was aiming not for secession from Turkey but for an autonomous region within the country, the increased importance of the Syrian Kurds resurrected these old fears in Ankara.<sup>570</sup> The already poor confidence was further exacerbated when, despite Western pressure to support the Kurdish cause in “the final battle against IS”, Turkey refused to open any channel of cooperation that could have favored Kurdish militias. As Lindenstrauss mentions, “Turkey’s initial unwillingness to help the Syrian Kurds in the battle over Kobanê was read by the Kurds in Turkey as an expression of the government’s insincerity in the peace talks.”<sup>571</sup> Therefore, when President Erdoğan enthusiastically declared “Kobanê is about to fall” in late

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<sup>565</sup> Interviews.

<sup>566</sup> Interviews.

<sup>567</sup> Interview.

<sup>568</sup> This section is largely drawn from an article of this thesis’ author with other colleagues that is set to be published in early 2025. Abrami, Gasco, R., & Baser, B. (2025). New Securitization Waves of the Kurdish Question. A Three(plus)-Level Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy.

<sup>569</sup> Interview.

<sup>570</sup> Resch, E. M. (2017). *Syria's Impact on the Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey*. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

<sup>571</sup> Lindenstrauss, G. (2016). Back to Square One? The Collapse of the Peace Process with the Kurds in Turkey. *Strategic Assessment*, 18(4).



September 2014, violent clashes between different groups erupted in many cities in Turkey.<sup>572</sup> Moreover, the mid-2010s highlighted that human security in Turkey was precarious due to overt political violence, including urban warfare and terrorist attacks on Turkish soil. This profoundly affected how Kurdish activists perceived the Turkish state's stance toward them.<sup>573</sup>

A last attempt to re-galvanize the peace process was undertaken in February 2015 when representatives of the Turkish government and the BDP met to agree on several principles. However, the tension escalated dramatically during the period between the two elections after a peak in terrorist attacks against civilians. As a result, all political parties withdrew from any possible further negotiation. Therefore, this meant the end of the peace process and a wholesale return to a period of “trench wars.”<sup>574</sup> After a period of “securitizing the peace process” by cautiously framing it as essential for national security, Turkey’s state shifted to a more traditional approach, treating the Kurdish issue primarily as a pure security threat again. This re-securitization meant focusing on military and security measures rather than political solutions, reverting to a war-like stance against Kurdish groups perceived as threats. Thus, “a short period of *securitization of peace* was then followed by the Turkish state’s resorting to a more traditional *securitization of war* (re-securitization) of the Kurdish question.”<sup>575</sup> In this sense, this process had a double face that cannot be adequately explained without taking into account how regional dynamics affected the internal level. As already mentioned, the perceived collision of Washington’s agenda with the broader ambitions of Kurdish geopolitics “created a receptive Turkish audience ready to believe that there existed US designs to create an independent Kurdish state in Iraq, through a model which will be replicated in Syria, and eventually in Turkey.”<sup>576</sup> This was echoed in pronouncements issued by Turkish government officials, including Erdoğan himself, who bluntly accused the US-led coalition of launching airstrikes against the Arabs and Turkmen of Tal Abyad “and settling the PYD and PKK terror organizations in their places.”<sup>577</sup> These suspicions are reflected in Erdoğan’s and other leading official’s increasingly abrasive and exclusionary discourse, which represents significant backtracking from the vision of interethnic harmony he had earlier championed. In March 2015, by declaring that “there is no Kurdish problem, only PKK terror,” he officially put an end to the Peace process. A few days later, Selahattin

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<sup>572</sup> As Yegen explains in detail, On 6-8 October, the Kurdish people poured into the streets to protest against the week-long siege of Kobani in Syria by the IS and the government’s “apathy” towards or even “contentment” with the siege and the possible fall of Kobani. Almost a civil war, the Kobani events resulted in the death of more than forty civilians, most of whom were HDP supporters. See Yegen, 2023.

<sup>573</sup> As mentioned by Öztürk & Baser, 2023.

<sup>574</sup> These were promptly crushed by Turkey’s security forces. See Yegen, 2023, 2.

<sup>575</sup> Idem. See also Abrami, et al. 2025.

<sup>576</sup> Kardaş, 2021, 297. An interviewee stressed that “these developments revived the Sevres Syndrome for many Turks who believed that there is a hidden agenda that threatens Turkey’s territorial integrity.”

<sup>577</sup> TCCB. (2015, September 6). *Şehitlerin Bedelini Çok Ağır Ödeteceği*. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/34241/sehitlerin-bedelini-cok-agir-odetecegiz>.

Demirtaş, the leader of the pro-Kurdish HDP announced his party's opposition to Erdoğan's proposed constitutional reform to change Turkey's system of government to an executive Presidency. The June 2015 Turkish general election provided an opportunity to test these different political strategies. Popular support for the AKP gradually declined, leaving the party far from the parliamentary majority and forcing it to enter negotiations to form a coalition government. Conversely, the success of the HDP, which secured more than 13% of the vote and established itself as the country's second-largest opposition party was another shocking result. As the HDP fiercely campaigned against the proposed constitutional change, it became clear that the path to an executive Presidency would involve quashing the HDP's resistance and reducing its parliamentary representation.<sup>578</sup> The events of June to November 2015 perfectly illustrate this change in Ankara's approach. The resurgence of the violent conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK led to the collapse of the negotiations to form a new governing coalition. At the end of an electoral campaign in which the AKP and Turkey's pro-government media outlets insisted relentlessly on the connections between the PKK and the HDP, Turkish citizens went back to the polls on November 1, 2015, and finally reconfirmed Erdoğan in power.<sup>579</sup>

The combination of these elements pushed the Turkish government to take steps to the effect of re-securitizing the Kurdish question and Kurdish identity, which ceased to be a topic of public debate as phrasing the term Kurdistan or debating Kurdish autonomy began to be prosecuted on the ground of being on par with the PKK "by reverting to the old Kemalist pattern of interpreting the actions of the political opposition or domestic minority groups through the prism of regional and domestic security concerns."<sup>580</sup> This shift after the June 7 elections can also be explained by the AKP's necessity to gain the sympathy of nationalist voters and the MHP to maintain its dominant position in the political system.<sup>581</sup> Other than the travails of transition to a presidential system, the thwarted coup attempt of July 2016 enormously amplified concerns in the ruling elite to adopt regime survival strategies. Therefore, in this period, the concerns for national survival in the face of regional crises, skepticism towards Western partners, and the need to pursue heavy-handed security policies domestically and internationally were defining hallmarks of the newly established Peoples' Alliance hegemonic block.<sup>582</sup> In this regard, the MHP has emerged as a de facto veto player, if not a shareholder, in shaping the content and direction of Turkish domestic and foreign policies. Indeed,

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<sup>578</sup> O'Connor, F., & Baser, B. (2018). Communal violence and ethnic polarization before and after the 2015 elections in Turkey: Attacks against the HDP and the Kurdish population. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(1), 53–72.

<sup>579</sup> (Siccardi, 2021.

<sup>580</sup> Interview.

<sup>581</sup> Özpek, 2019.

<sup>582</sup> Weiss, 2016.

the rise of a new governing bloc in an environment of re-securitized domestic politics further cemented the critical attitude of Ankara's regional approach towards Kurdish geopolitics, as the PKK and other Kurdish actors came to be viewed as a separatist force. In the realm of foreign policy, nationalist feelings have been already running high, with the Turkish media even advocating overtly irredentist ideas *vis-à-vis* Turkey's historical rights in Iraq and Syria. Given the sensitivities of the core constituencies behind the AKP-MHP bloc, perceived gains by the PKK along Turkey's southern borders have unleashed ethno-nationalist mobilization that has come to play a more significant role in the making of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>583</sup> Due to the social tensions that were beginning to arise, Turkey decided to explore the possibility of creating areas in Syria where refugees could be relocated. Nevertheless, Kurdish empowerment beyond Turkish borders rekindled Turkey's threat perception on potential Kurdish demands within its own territory and led to a regime survival strategy that further exacerbated Turkey's approach to the Kurdish issue.<sup>584</sup>

In this sense, it is noteworthy that since 2016, key moments in Turkey's struggle against Kurdish separatism and its interventions in Syria coincided with major electoral events in the country: the constitutional referendum in April 2017, the snap parliamentary elections in 2018, and the municipal elections in 2019.<sup>585</sup> Turkish military operations played a crucial role in weakening the opposition and boosting Turkish nationalism. Especially Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch played a pivotal role in increasing support for the referendum and the parliamentary elections to cope with drops in popular approval ratings for the President.<sup>586</sup> In general, it becomes evident that in Turkish politics, the interplay between the domestic and international levels often goes hand in hand. In times of legitimacy crises, the ruling party's strategy involves creating domestic distractions to shift the attention to military operations with varying degrees of justification to bolster popular support. From an internal perspective, the crucial role played by the MHP in implementing the long-desired constitutional referendum evidenced how Erdoğan's margin of movement became more sensitive to the political will of the latter. In this sense, the 2018 military operation in Syria was illustrative. The capture of Afrin within a week was promptly followed by the announcement of early elections in 2018 instead of 2019. This demonstrated how multilevel politics is a functional mechanism in shaping the choices of the FPE. Regarding foreign policy, when the AKP-MHP alliance became official, TFP steered towards a more aggressive approach. Domestically, this fueled the

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<sup>583</sup> Arısan, M. (2022). Populism, victimhood and Turkish foreign policy under AKP rule. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 681–700.

<sup>584</sup> Yükselen, 2020.

<sup>585</sup> Operation Olive Branch for Afrin (January 20–March 24, 2018) was followed by the June 2018 general elections, Operation Euphrates Shield (24 August 2016–29 March 2017) was followed by the April 2017 constitutional change, and Operation Claw in May/June 2019 was followed by the 2019 local elections, and continued with the major Peace Spring Operation in October 2019.

<sup>586</sup> Siccardi, 2021.

alliance's growing nationalist rhetoric aimed at undermining the legitimacy and credibility of the opposition. In this context, the HDP is the party that has been most affected. The crackdown intensified during particular moments of difficulty for the government party, such as the defeat in the 2019 municipal elections and the "Peace Spring" military operation in 2019. The opposition coalition led by the CHP needed the Kurdish support to win the elections. Furthermore, the attempted "alliance" between the CHP and the HDP further exacerbated the government's narrative that "the HDP, the PKK, and the YPG are all the same."<sup>587</sup>

Indeed, though based on a military strategic logic, Turkish cross-border operations are often strongly linked to motivations stemming from the domestic realm along three main objectives. The first one lies in further antagonizing the opposition, delicately attempting to balance a nationalist and a democratic approach to the Kurdish issue. This is because, given the heterogeneity within the opposition, parties tread a fine line to avoid completely alienating the Kurdish component. Military operations make this strategy increasingly challenging to pursue. Secondly, military operations further securitize the Kurdish issue, creating an atmosphere conducive to the criminalization of the pro-Kurdish HDP party.<sup>588</sup> While the international public is familiar with the case of Selahattin Demirtaş – the former co-chair and presidential candidate of the HDP who has been imprisoned since 2016 – the political oppression against HDP members is extensive and includes several MPs, mayors, and a significant number of party activists.<sup>589</sup> Despite these repressive policies, in the context of the 2023 elections, the HDP has demonstrated remarkable resilience, seeking to transform and adapt.<sup>590</sup> Lastly, military operations bolster the classic "rally round the flag" phenomenon, as evidenced by the popular support for Erdoğan, who consistently gains three or four percentage points after any military actions. It should also be noted that this newly emerging domestic coalition of elites tends to use foreign policy crises to cover domestic difficulties, especially economic ones. Foreign policy rhetoric and actions also boost their domestic legitimacy and standing. Increasing economic troubles and democratic deficits in domestic politics have all been followed by a more assertive foreign policy outlook.<sup>591</sup> At the same time, when national interest is at stake, this boosts the incumbent party's electorate and results in transversal support from a broader political spectrum.<sup>592</sup> This mechanism shows how this ontological security operating at an individual level is also highlighted by the quiet

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<sup>587</sup> Koontz, K. (2020). Turkey's Parliamentary Purge and the HDP's Dilemma. Policy Paper.

<sup>588</sup> Çevik, S. (2022). Turkey's military operations in Syria and Iraq. *SWP Comment*.

<sup>589</sup> By the end of 2021, 41% of all party members had been detained at least once in the preceding six months, while 17 % were imprisoned. See Kaliber, A., & Whiting, M. (2023). Engaging minorities under emergency: Turkish modular emergency and the Kurdish case revisited. *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), 1–18.

<sup>590</sup> Interview.

<sup>591</sup> Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, 29.

<sup>592</sup> Interview. A similar view stresses: "It should be noted also that despite severe political polarization, the latest interventions in Syria, Iraq, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean receive broad cross-party support in Turkey." Ibid., 30. Similar findings in Hoffmann, 2019.

stance – if not bi-partisan alignment – of the main opposition party CHP against a common perceived threat.<sup>593</sup> As such,

The domestic and foreign security problems Turkey faced during this period created a nationalist atmosphere. In brief, it is clear that AKP handles foreign policy crises in the pursuit of larger domestic legitimacy, and the momentum it builds in doing so is assisted by populist rhetoric as an integral part of domestic consumption. Thus, the militarization of Turkish foreign policy progresses in tandem with the securitization of domestic politics.<sup>594</sup>

### 7.3. The Individual Level

#### 7.3.1. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Ideology and Pragmatism

Love him or loathe him, he is one of Turkey's most successful politicians.<sup>595</sup>

Erdoğan is not only our reis [paternal leader] but, more importantly, he is the national mirror in which we see ourselves [...] is the second Atatürk. He cares for the people and is fearless.<sup>596</sup>

At the same time,

He represents the historical revenge of the Islamists and accompanying conservative forces whom the Republic tried so hard to bury and leave in the past. He does not want to just replace the old elite with his own circle of Islamists but rather he also wants to extract the revenge of the Anatolian conservative masses. Therefore, the destruction of the Kemalist institutions is part of his political objectives and he has succeeded.<sup>597</sup>

and

Turkish foreign policy under the AKP gives the appearance at times of being “devoid of instrumental rationality”, or of being “a captive of [Erdoğan's] ideological convictions”, convictions which have led some to “question the mental condition of Turkey's “Islamist” strongman and project him as the nearest approximation of a mad king pursuing over-ambitious foreign policy activism in the region.”<sup>598</sup>

When examining the individual level of TFP during the AKP era, there is a tendency to attribute Turkish power projection to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ego, adventurism, or ideology.<sup>599</sup> On

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<sup>593</sup> Umit, R. (2023). Rallies around the flag-draped coffins: The electoral effects of security force casualties in terror attacks. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 11(1), 53–62.

<sup>594</sup> Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, 30.

<sup>595</sup> BBC News. (2014, August 28). Turkey's Erdoğan is Inaugurated as President.

<sup>596</sup> Yavuz, M. H. (2021). *Erdoğan: The making of an autocrat*. Edinburgh University Press, 40.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Taş, 2022.

<sup>599</sup> As an experiment, the author conducted an Internet search of the term “Erdoğan risky gamble” and found dozens of articles dating back more than a decade, applied to more than a dozen diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives. This has also been referred to as *reductio ad Erdoganum*: Kadercan, B. (2015, September 8). The Unbearable Lightness of Blaming Erdoğan. *War on the Rocks*;

the one hand, it is undoubtedly crucial to consider that “it is a mistake to assume that leaders experiencing the same political event have similar goals and will choose similar responses without suggesting their definitions of the situation and beliefs are somewhat equivalent.”<sup>600</sup> Conversely, others observe that TFP “...is not the work of one man [...]. Rather, it is the response of Turkey’s political and military elite to disappointment.”<sup>601</sup> In other words, leaders do not operate in a vacuum but are embedded and conditioned by the context in which they operate. That said, there is no doubt that Erdoğan has emerged as a pivotal figure in Turkish politics, who reshaped the nation’s internal level and redefined its global positioning through a complex interplay of ideological conviction, pragmatic adaptation, and charismatic authority.

Although Turkey has been traditionally characterized by strong leadership, both enthusiasts and opponents seem to agree that Erdoğan’s influence over the political process in Turkey has recently reached a level rarely seen in modern Turkish political history. Yet, Erdoğan is a political figure who eludes simple characterizations, which has led to an ongoing debate about his character traits and how they influence his government’s policy choices. Some see him as an “aggressive” and forceful figure who thrives on confrontation, as evidenced by his demeanor toward critics and rivals;<sup>602</sup> others view him as a “charismatic” and “pragmatic” leader who can inspire loyal followers.<sup>603</sup> Yet others claim he is “a wolf dressed in sheep’s clothing, waiting for the opportune moment to implement his supposed hidden agenda.”<sup>604</sup> Finally, while some see Erdoğan’s Turkey as a pawn in American plans for the region, others praise him for his independence of action and balanced approach to foreign policy.<sup>605</sup>

In this sense, to understand Erdoğan’s influence, it is still essential to examine his personal background and the distinct trajectory that brought him to power. Born in 1954 in the conservative Black Sea province of Rize, Erdoğan grew up in the working-class Kasımpaşa neighborhood of Istanbul, a context that heavily impacted his world vision.<sup>606</sup> His early education at a religious Imam Hatip school set him apart from most of Turkey’s elite, who were often educated and professionally

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Çağaptay, S. (2021). A Sultan in Autumn: Erdoğan Faces Turkey’s Uncontainable Forces. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

<sup>600</sup> Abelson, R. P. (1986). Beliefs Are Like Possessions. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 16(3), 225. Similarly, as Snyder et al. note: “external reality, or the operational world, is in fact “composed” of what the decision-makers decide is important,” Cited in Hudson, 2005, 1, 3.

<sup>601</sup> Outzen, 2021.

<sup>602</sup> Özgürel, A. (2006, June 21). Erdoğan’ın Sınırları. *Radikal*.

<sup>603</sup> Çakır, R., & Çalmuk, F. (2001). *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Bir dönüşüm öyküsü*. Metis Yayınları.

<sup>604</sup> Çağaptay, S. (2008, August 8). The Dream of a New Turkey. *Newsweek*.

<sup>605</sup> Tibi, B. (2009). Islamism and Democracy: On the Compatibility of Institutional Islamism and the Political Culture of Democracy. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10(2), 135–164; Milliyet. (2004, February 25). *Büyük Ortadoğu Projesi*. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/yaman-toruner/buyuk-ortadogu-projesi-5115808>.

<sup>606</sup> Yavuz, 2021.

grown in prestigious Western-oriented institutions.<sup>607</sup> This background allowed Erdoğan to present himself as a leader connected to the masses, in contrast to a distant, secular establishment.<sup>608</sup> His political career began in the 1970s as a youth member of Necmettin Erbakan's political movement, where he quickly rose to prominence, culminating in his election as Istanbul's mayor in 1994. His tenure as mayor was marked by pragmatic governance – improving infrastructure and public services – but also by an early expression of his Islamist inclinations. His 1998 imprisonment for reciting a poem that equated minarets to “bayonets” and domes to “helmets” cemented his image as a “*mazlum*” (a victim of state oppression) while simultaneously reinforcing his reputation as a “*kabadayi*” (a respected local strongman) after he got his sit in the Turkish Parliament in 2003 finally.<sup>609</sup> This background contributes to what Kesgin describes as Erdoğan's “categorical thinking,” a tendency to interpret events in stark, binary terms – friend versus enemy, Islamic versus secular, national versus foreign – and reject dissenting views or nuanced policy approaches.<sup>610</sup> This would also help explain his efforts to build personal connections with his audience. He frequently refers to other leaders as “my friends,” demonstrating this emphasis on relationships.<sup>611</sup> İhami Güler, a leading theologian at Ankara University and a leading critic of the politicization of Islam, explains that

he is a pious Muslim who confronts death and, with his bravado culture, is not cowed by it. [Erdoğan] sees death as the soul returning to its Creator. The daring position he has taken on a number of issues makes him the “hero they’ve been waiting for” who will bring an end to the humiliation of the Muslims.<sup>612</sup>

Concurrently, Erdoğan also showcased a pragmatic attitude since the beginning of his premiership. A clear example is his conciliatory rhetoric during the first AKP's mandate, a period when he needed to secure support domestically (from the Kemalists) and externally (from the West) to push the party's reformist agenda further.

Before anything else, I'm a Muslim...I have a responsibility to God, who created me, and I try to fulfill that responsibility, but I try now very much to keep this away from my political life, to keep it private... A political party cannot have a religion. Only individuals can...religion is so supreme that it cannot be politically exploited or taken advantage of.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> For a good contextualized biography see Çağaptay, S. (2017). *The new sultan: Erdogan and the crisis of modern Turkey*. I. B. Tauris.

<sup>608</sup> Yavuz, M. H. (2009). *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press, 52.

<sup>609</sup> Kesgin, 2020, 64.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>611</sup> In fact, Erdoğan even invited and hosted Italian PM Berlusconi and the Greek Karamanlis at his son's wedding, underscoring the importance he places on these personal ties. Seemingly he had a similar tones with Assad before 2011 and with Putin before 2022. This focus on relationships might also shed light on Erdoğan's behavior at Davos, where his strong affiliation with the Palestinians led to his outburst. For instance, Erdoğan's relationship-driven approach extended to his support of Sudanese policies in Darfur, where he controversially claimed that “Muslims do not commit genocide. Ibid., 70.

<sup>612</sup> Quoted in Yavuz, 2021, 24.

<sup>613</sup> Sontag, D. (2003, May 11). The Erdoğan Experiment. *New York Times*.

Let aside these discourses, in the domestic sphere, Erdoğan's leadership is characterized by an "expansionist" approach focused on consolidating power over political institutions, including the judiciary, military, and media. His governance style is often framed as a defense against external and internal enemies, positioning himself as the guardian of the "real" Turkey against secular elites who, in his words, "hold the people in contempt" and seek to undermine Turkey's Islamic values.<sup>614</sup> However, Erdoğan's leadership is also marked by pragmatism, particularly in foreign policy, showcasing a form of "two-level game": domestically, he is confrontational and uses aggressive rhetoric to consolidate his base, while internationally, he often adopts a more "collegial" and diplomatic stance, seeking to build alliances and negotiate from a position of strength. This dual strategy reflects his ability to adapt his leadership style to different contexts, enhancing his effectiveness both at home and abroad.<sup>615</sup> As Hakan Yavuz suggests, Erdoğan's leadership transcends the boundaries of the AKP itself, reflecting a "hegemony and dominance" that fundamentally alters Turkey's trajectory.<sup>616</sup>

[...] he knows how to play to several constituencies, he often adopts multiple incongruent roles: one for his traditional Turkish Sunni Muslim supporters, and another for his secularist domestic and international audiences. He calls the fighters in Iraq alternatively 'martyrs' and 'terrorists', and labels Israel as a 'terrorist state', and yet he still desires to maintain a strategic relationship in his role as a statesman in order to maintain good relations with the US. He has also been genuinely committed to achieving the long-sought membership of the EU before souring on it after what he believed was implacable anti-Turkish and Muslim hostility on the part of Western leaders.<sup>617</sup>

Çağatay similarly observed that the AKP had "an awkward pendulum-like political identity: the party would be pro-Western and anti-Western, "pro-soft secularism" and anti-secularist, all at the same time."<sup>618</sup> In Erdoğan's view,

As a President who was elected with 52% of the votes, I have been working from the first day I took office to fulfill the promises I made to our people. Inspired by the compass metaphor from Rumi, we firmly planted one foot in Turkey while visiting the world with the other one in order to pursue the policies of our country and people at the highest level. We never shied away from speaking the truth on matters that concern my people, my country, my brothers and those who are oppressed and who suffer around the world. Instead of the formerly passive and one dimensional understanding of foreign policy, we engaged in active diplomacy by prioritizing the interests of our people and country, and raising our voice against injustice. Our understanding of foreign policy based on peace, justice and values was not rhetorical; it manifested itself in many regions including Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, the Balkans and Central Asia. As a result of our efforts, Turkey is now providing the highest amount

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<sup>614</sup> Bucak, S. (2014, August 24). Turkey's Erdoğan Seen Softening Style Not Substance as President. *Reuters*.

<sup>615</sup> Kesgin, 2020, 64. Moreover, Yavuz claimed Erdoğan represents "a split identity, torn between his Islamic identity and the politics that he is obliged to pursue to stay in government. He has to play a dual role: one for his traditional Islamic supporters, and one for his secularist domestic and international audience." See Yavuz, 2009, 121.

<sup>616</sup> Yavuz, 2020, 65.

<sup>617</sup> Yavuz, 2021, 42.

<sup>618</sup> Çağatay, 2017, 104.



of humanitarian aid in the world as a ratio of its gross national product. At a time when the most developed countries in the world have closed their doors to the oppressed who are fleeing war, hunger and terrorism, our country has been hosting 3 million asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq for the last 6 years without making any discrimination based on ethnic origin, language or religion.<sup>619</sup>

### 7.3.2. “Yeni Türkiye” Inside-Out

With the first popularly elected President taking office, today is the day that Turkey rises from its ashes. It is the day the process of building the New Turkey gains strength.<sup>620</sup>

The term “New Turkey” (*Yeni Türkiye*) is primordial in Turkey’s history, and it was used by senior members of the ruling AKP well before. However, the declaration above officially reintroduced the concept into the Turkish political vocabulary in 2014, after the first presidential elections. The expression was used as an overarching idea to draw together all the changes introduced over the AKP’s then twelve-year – and now more than twenty-years – incumbency. According to its leader and current President Erdoğan’s understanding,

the party has not only formed a government, governed the state, conducted politics and held authority, but had been executing a civilizational consolidation whose project is to redesign Turkey, to found it again after a hundred years.<sup>621</sup>

In this sense, the idea of “New Turkey” is both an electoral manifesto and a popular narrative of politics, culture, business, and everyday life. With the AKP, *Yeni Türkiye* has acquired unique visibility, combining Islamist features, anti-western rhetoric, and memories of the Ottoman golden age. It not only draws on reinterpretations of history and a glorification of the pre-republican past but also has concrete impacts in discarding the old Kemalist vision as a utopian top-down nation-building process. As Menderes Çınar argues, this entails a process of “de-democratization, Islamism, and anti-Westernism,” all of which are intertwined to redefine Turkey as a “Muslim nation” free from the constraints of Western secularism.<sup>622</sup> This vision represents a sharp departure from the Kemalist principles of secularism, nationalism, and Western alignment that have shaped Turkish politics since the Republic’s foundation. The *Yeni Türkiye* narrative seeks to frame the AKP as the authentic representative of the Turkish people, contrasting it with what Erdoğan describes as an imposed

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<sup>619</sup> Erdoğan, R. T. (2017). “*The World is Bigger than 5.*” *The Vision of New Turkey*. Secretariat General of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 9.

<sup>620</sup> TCB. (n.d.). *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Anıtkabir’de*. <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/1310/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-anitkabirde.html>.

<sup>621</sup> AKP Arşivi. (2014). *Yerel Seçimleri Seçim Beyannamesi Sayfalar*. AKP Arşivi. : <https://www.akparti.org.tr/media/fjshy4eb/2014-yerel-secimleri-secim-beyannamesi-sayfalar.pdf>.

<sup>622</sup> Çınar, M. (2018). Turkey’s ‘Western’ or ‘Muslim’ identity and the AKP’s civilizational discourse. *Turkish Studies*, 19(2), 177.

Kemalist ideology that sought to sever Turkey from its Islamic and Ottoman roots. Erdoğan has frequently criticized this “alien” project, arguing that “for two hundred years, they wanted to separate us from our history, from our ancestors, from our cause.”<sup>623</sup> As such, *Yeni Türkiye* is both a rhetorical device and a practical blueprint for governance. It draws on a “selective recycling of the past,” reconstructing historical events to create a “counter-memory” that challenges the official Kemalist narrative.<sup>624</sup> For example, the AKP has invoked Ottoman history and Islamic identity to bolster its legitimacy and foster a sense of national pride. As Yavuz notes, “the AKP’s most vital source of legitimacy blends nostalgia for the old with a new vision for the future, inventing a tradition that establishes continuity with a golden pre-Kemalist past.”<sup>625</sup>

This ideological construct also serves as a tool for political mobilization. By portraying the AKP as the sole legitimate voice of “native” and “national” identity, the narrative marginalizes opposition as unrepresentative or even treasonous. Therefore, *Yeni Türkiye* is “both a catchword, disseminated publicly to define the core elements of a particular national conception aimed at hegemony and a mobilizing tool intended to de-contest that which is fundamentally contested—namely, national identity.”<sup>626</sup> This ideological framework allows the AKP to frame its political struggle not merely as a contest for power but as a moral crusade to reclaim Turkey’s authentic identity. Erdoğan has frequently remarked the tangible success of the AKP is its novel understanding of politics that has broken with the disconnect between the societal and political centers, rendering them identical instead. The framework was appealing to both Islamist intellectuals, for whom it “offered the promise of self-identification with the oppressed (*mazlum*), and liberals, for whom it presented the opposite.”<sup>627</sup> Constructing politics in binary categories such as “state-society,” “White Turks-Black Turks,” “Istanbul-Anatolia” or “happy minority-silent majority,” the AKP was built on an anti-elitist and anti-establishment discourse.<sup>628</sup> Its populist politics was about the construction of “the people” via an equivalent chain weaving together heterogeneous demands through its opposition against an illegitimate elite, i.e., the Kemalist political and bureaucratic elite who ran the country for

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<sup>623</sup> Erdoğan, 2014.

<sup>624</sup> Ege, 2024.

<sup>625</sup> What seems to be at play in Turkey is the “politics of nostalgia”, which operates as “a whitewashed past, a glorious era that everyone can rally around, everyone and everything being of a constructed and contested nature”. Elçi, E. (2022). Politics of Nostalgia and Populism: Evidence from Turkey. *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(2), 722.

<sup>626</sup> Alaranta, 2015, 94.

<sup>627</sup> Levin, P. T. (2023). Reflections on Şerif Mardin’s center-periphery thesis. *Turkish Studies*, 24(3–4), 625.

<sup>628</sup> A famous discourse was: “According to them, we don’t understand politics. According to them, we don’t understand art, theatre, cinema, and poetry. According to them, we are uneducated, ignorant, the lower class who has to be content with what is being given, needy, meaning we are a group of negroes [Zenci]...In this country, there are Black Turks and White Turks. Your brother Tayyip belongs to the Black Turks.” In Yavuz, 2021, 39.

decades<sup>629</sup>. Erdoğan popularized the term “CHP’s oppression” (*CHP zulmü*), a term characteristic of the Turkish center-right, which marks the recent past by the perpetual victimhood of conservative Anatolian people under the oppressive secular bureaucratic elite.<sup>630</sup>

As it became the dominant political actor at the expense of the secular military/judiciary tutelage, the AKP turned out to be more subversive in promoting the national and religious characteristics of the people. It is from watersheds like the Gezi Park protests and the 2016 failed coup that one can trace the components of AKP’s project to secure the state, which pushed further its plan to construct a New Turkey. For instance, a clear example of this emotionally powerful narrative can be found in Erdoğan’s speech at the start of his presidential election campaign in July 2014.

For two hundred years, they wanted to separate us from our history [...] from our ancestors [...] from our cause. They wanted us to behave humbly in front of everyone. They wanted to force us into a certain model. They even went so far that they thought they could arrange things in Turkey just by waving their fingers. [...] We are the people, we are Alparslan, and we are the grandchildren of Süleyman Shah and Osman Gazi. We are the heirs of Mehmed the Conqueror and Yavuz Sultan Selim. We are the ones who carry forward the memory of Gazi Mustafa Kemal, Menderes, Özal, and Erbakan. We are the followers of those martyrs whose blood is writing our epics.<sup>631</sup>

This kind of discourse demonstrates how the AKP was no niche player, but one that could act as a dominant party able to reshape the socio-political landscape in its favor. In doing so, it has never rejected the Kemalist tradition but rather tried to add its conservative-Islamist ideology to the inclusive shared social and cultural traditions of the Turkish people, seemingly without breaking away from alleged universal democratic principles. As marked earlier, such a strategy fits well with the argument that in Turkey, “there is a process of nationalization of Islam and (...) Islamization of nationalism.”<sup>632</sup> In this regard, there is much debate over what Islamist parties are, whether they can/will moderate to embrace liberal democratic values in party politics, and how secular/democratic their incumbencies have been. Nowadays, Turkey can be defined as a “competitive authoritarian” regime, where there are formal democratic institutions, such as regular elections and opposition parties, but the playing field is highly skewed in favor of the ones in power.<sup>633</sup> However, it is still

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<sup>629</sup> Ongur, H. O. (2018). *Plus Ça Change ... Re-Articulating Authoritarianism in the New Turkey*. *Critical Sociology*, 44(1), 45–59; Yalvaç, F., & Joseph, J. (2019). Understanding populist politics in Turkey: A hegemonic depth approach. *Review of International Studies*, 45(5), 786–804.

<sup>630</sup> AK Parti. (2014). *Bunlar cemaat filan değil, örgüt*. <https://www.akparti.org.tr/haberler/bunlar-cemaat-filan-degil-orgut/>.

<sup>631</sup> Aktif Haber. (2014, July 2). *İşte Erdoğan’ın Köşk Adaylığı Konuşması*. <http://www.aktifhaber.com/iste-erdoganin-kosk-adayligi-konusmasi-1009564h.html>.

<sup>632</sup> Waxman, 2000, 21.

<sup>633</sup> Esen & Gumuscu, 2016. According to many studies, Erdoğan has increasingly reflected a majoritarian or even plebiscitarian understanding of democracy, focusing heavily on the support from the 50 % of the electorate that backs him while disregarding the sentiments of the other half. He views the “ballot box” as the sole legitimate mechanism for democratic accountability, dismissing anti-government demonstrations as attempts by a minority to unlawfully impose their will on the majority. This perspective aligns closely with Guillermo O’Donnell’s concept of “Delegative Democracy” (DD), which is characterized by a personalistic leadership style, or “*personalismo*,” where democracy is reduced to the mere act of voting, with little regard for broader democratic processes or

important to understand that, within this framework, some vote for the ruling party not because they are forced to do so but because they have a vested interest in that party's rule and/or because they believe in its leaders and their vision. Furthermore, while it is easier to understand why Islamist parties appealed to voters when they provided an alternative to bad governance, it is crucial to find what explains AKP's persisting popularity even in times when its mission and way of ruling are perceived by some – if not many – as ineffective. This might be attributed to Erdoğan's ability to present himself as a powerful, strong politician and concurrently a pious man attached to its origins.

Those who viewed the Office of the President and the Çankaya Palace, which had become synonymous with the Presidency, as the defenders of their elitist regimes instead of a position representing the people's will were extremely upset by the change that occurred in 2014. When the complex in Beştepe, where construction began when I was Prime Minister, was passed on to the Office of the President, they were even more upset. Massive smear campaigns were initiated about the Beştepe Complex in order to damage the reputation of the Office of the President. However, I have always tried to fulfill my promise to my people. I promised that when elected as President, I would “be different, work hard, be busy, and fight the good fight.” On issues that concerned my country and my people, I took the initiative and led the way by explaining my views to the public, conveying my recommendations to the government, and sending messages to the entire world.<sup>634</sup>

These processes and ideas extend beyond symbolic actions, such as the reconversion of *Aya Sofya* from a museum into a mosque, to a comprehensive effort to reshape other strands of society for political purposes. Erdoğan declared in 2012, “Our aim is to raise a pious generation.”<sup>635</sup> The expansion of Imam Hatip schools, which provide a religious-based education, is a key component of this strategy. The AKP has increased the number of these schools and integrated religious studies more deeply into the national curriculum. As Lüküslü points out, “this shift in education policy reflects a broader attempt to reshape Turkish society in line with the AKP's vision.”<sup>636</sup> The goal is to cultivate a new generation aligned with the AKP's ideological objectives, one steeped in Islamic values and committed to the party's vision of a New Turkey. In addition, the AKP has repurposed

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institutional checks and balances. O'Donnell explains that in DDs, “elections are a very emotional and high-stakes event” where candidates compete for the opportunity to govern “virtually free of all constraints,” and voters are expected to remain a passive audience once elections conclude. This notion seems more relevant today, especially when considering Erdoğan's leadership style during his third term, which exhibits clear elements of “personalismo.” He emphasizes a strong personal mission and consolidates authority, framing the expression of the “national will” through the ballot box as nearly sacred and the only valid form of democratic legitimacy. See Özbudun, E. (2014). AKP at the Crossroads: Erdoğan's Majoritarian Drift. *South European Society and Politics*, 19(2), 155–167; O'Donnell, G. A. (1994) ‘Delegative democracy’, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 55– 69. For an account of other definitions, see Yilmaz, I., & Bashirov, G. (2018). The AKP after 15 years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 39(9), 1812–1830.

<sup>634</sup> Erdoğan, 2017, 7.

<sup>635</sup> Hürriyet. (2012, February 1). “Dindar bir gençlik yetiştirmek istiyoruz.” <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/dindar-bir-genclik-yetistirmek-istiyoruz-19819295>.

<sup>636</sup> Lüküslü, D. (2016). Creating a pious generation: Youth and education policies of the AKP in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 637–649.

state institutions, such as the Diyanet, to advance its ideological goals at home and abroad.<sup>637</sup> For instance, the AKP has repositioned ideologically aligned conservative-nationalist Turks within the diaspora as loyal allies who contribute to enhancing Turkey's legitimacy and soft power on an international scale, fostering a new state-centric identity.<sup>638</sup> As Öztürk contends, the Diyanet “advance[s] a much more explicitly ideological political agenda at the best of the ruling party [and] synchronized with the ruling party’s discourses and actions.”<sup>639</sup> The sermons delivered in mosques often refer to political issues and rally support for AKP’s politics. Their content reveals a clear shift toward religious nationalism that carries heavy populist undertones and is increasingly supportive of committing violence in the name of religion. For instance, the memory of the July 15 coup was rapidly institutionalized, with public spaces across the country renamed in honor of the resistance. For instance, the Bosphorus Bridge, where civilians confronted soldiers, became the “15 July Martyrs Bridge,” and numerous other sites were rebranded with names evoking “democracy” and “martyrdom.”<sup>640</sup> Erdoğan’s government has also undertaken a monumental transformation of the urban landscape, with the construction of large mosque complexes and the renaming of public spaces to reflect Islamic heritage.<sup>641</sup> These efforts are part of a broader strategy to imprint the AKP’s ideological vision onto the everyday lives of Turkish citizens, reinforcing its message through visible and tangible changes to the physical environment.

Within this framework, in Turkey and in Muslim countries, neo-Ottomanism has evolved into a form of “Ottomania”, namely “a venue for re-evaluating and rehabilitating a tradition that was rejected by republican modernization.”<sup>642</sup> For instance, in daily life and the cultural sphere, there has

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<sup>637</sup> Traditionally a regulatory body designed to manage religious affairs in line with secular principles, the Diyanet has been transformed into a tool for promoting the AKP's vision of Islam. As Öztürk argues, “The Diyanet now advances a much more explicitly ideological political agenda at the behest of the ruling party, synchronized with the party's discourses and actions.” The Diyanet’s expanded mission includes international outreach, aiming to project Turkey’s Islamic identity abroad and influence Muslim communities in Europe, the Balkans, and beyond. See Öztürk, A. E. (2016). Turkey’s Diyanet under AKP rule: From protector to imposer of state ideology? *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 620.

<sup>638</sup> Arkilic, A. (2021). Turkish Populist Nationalism in Transnational Space: Explaining Diaspora Voting Behaviour in Homeland Elections. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23(4), 591.

<sup>639</sup> Öztürk, 2016, 620-22.

<sup>640</sup> Erdoğan likened the resistance to the coup to the War of Independence, latching on to the time-tested theme of Turkey being under threat by internal and external enemies – and saved by a strong-willed leader. The reis (captain or chief), as known to his partisans, also drew a parallel between his miraculous escape from Marmaris to Dalaman airport after midnight on 16 July and Prophet Muhammad’s hijra from Mecca to Medina. Government-controlled channels – public institutions, media, and the education system – spread the official mythology around the coup far and wide. Bechev, 2022, 170.

<sup>641</sup> Gümüşçü, 2024, 417. One of the most debated moves was the announcement of the end of COVID-19 curfews on the anniversary day of the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul with a ceremony held at *Ayasofya*, which had been established as a museum by the secular founders of Turkey but was reverted to a mosque by the AKP. Similarly, Islamization of the public space also continued with the building of huge mosque complexes in Istanbul and other cities. Other than the Çamlıca Mosque on the Anatolian side of Istanbul that now defines the silhouette of the city, after decades of impasse, Taksim Mosque has been built in what was the former highly symbolic space for republican memories, in clear contrast with the Atatürk Cultural Centre and the Gezi Park area, well-known after the 2013 antigovernmental protests. The AKP has also aimed to dominate the urban landscape in Ankara by building the *Küllîye* Presidential Compound. See also Batuman, B. (2018, February 9). Ottomanism. A hit TV show reimagines Turkey’s imperial past. *The New Yorker*.

<sup>642</sup> Ergin, M., & Karakaya, Y. (2017). Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomanism: Navigating state-led and popular cultural representations of the past. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 56, 41.

been an increase in the number of shops with Ottoman nomenclature and Ottoman restaurants, movies, soap operas, and even a football team. This would confirm that “Erdoğan’s worldview is primarily shaped by his religion; Erdoğan does not place much emphasis on notions of a nation or nationalism.”<sup>643</sup> In other words, while he cannot be viewed as unpatriotic, “his worldview is shaped by his religious upbringing, which supersedes his ethnic or regional origins.”<sup>644</sup> Yet, this does not imply that the AKP wishes to literally revive the Ottoman Empire. Instead, the party’s conception of Turkish identity integrates “nationalism rooted in Turkic glorification and the Ottoman pride,”<sup>645</sup> but with an added element of “ummahism” (or pan-Islamism), “a post-national, political identity” based on the idea that Muslims across the world ought to bind themselves together as a transnational body of believers.<sup>646</sup> In this sense, Erdoğan’s peculiarity is that he is a pious but pragmatic<sup>647</sup> leader [that] places significant importance on authority, honor, and loyalty.<sup>648</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that the AKP has also embraced the use of nativist rhetoric, which does not challenge the existence of the “West” but rather utilizes it as a counter-image to project an allegedly authentic and historically distinct Turkish Islamic civilization. In many of Erdoğan’s speeches, the West is portrayed as a hostile monolithic entity that seeks to “attack and humiliate the Islamic world,” framing the AKP’s mission in terms of a “Second War of Independence.”<sup>649</sup> Such rhetoric allows the party to reinforce its legitimacy by positioning itself as the defender of Turkish sovereignty against Western encroachment.

On the one hand, Erdoğan’s ideological vision extends into foreign policy through the framework of neo-Ottomanism, which seeks to reassert Turkey’s historical role as a regional power. Erdoğan frequently invokes Ottoman history to legitimize these foreign policy actions. In a 2014 speech, he declared, “We are the people, we are Alparslan, and we are the grandchildren of Süleyman Shah and Osman Gazi. We are the heirs of Mehmed the Conqueror and Yavuz Sultan Selim.”<sup>650</sup>

### **7.3.3. Neo-Ottomanism, Techno-nationalism, and Eurasianism to “Rally Around the Flag”**

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid. See also Çağatay, 2017.

<sup>644</sup> Yavuz, 2009, 131.

<sup>645</sup> Yilmaz, I., & Morieson, N. (2023). Civilizational Populism in Domestic and Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey. *Religions*, 14(5), 631.

<sup>646</sup> The term is taken from, Saunders, R. A. (2008). The ummah as nation: A reappraisal in the wake of the ‘Cartoons Affair.’ *Nations and Nationalism*, 14(2), 303.

<sup>647</sup> One interesting reminder of Erdoğan’s pragmatism is Çağatay’s observation that “while Erdoğan initially distanced to ‘anything to might sully the party’s essence...He took photo opportunities at *meyhanes* – tavern-style Turkish restaurant where alcohol flows freely’ during the 1989 local elections” (Çağatay, 2017, 63).

<sup>648</sup> Kesgin, 2020, 65.

<sup>649</sup> Erdoğan, 2016.

<sup>650</sup> Aktif Haber, 2014.

Critics argue that Erdoğan's foreign policy is often "devoid of instrumental rationality" or appears "a captive of [Erdoğan's] ideological convictions," leading to erratic and overambitious actions.<sup>651</sup> On the other hand, however, neo-Ottomanism has been subject to controversy. Indeed, after Davutoglu's departure, neo-Ottomanism aligned with what some describe as the "New Turkish Foreign Policy," which aims to demonstrate Turkey's increased military capabilities and operative autonomy while creating symbolic value for a "futuristic approach to defending the nation without harming its people."<sup>652</sup> From an approach with a strong emphasis on soft power and diplomatic engagement, it lately became imbued by reliance on hard power, particularly through military technology such as drones. A critical dimension of Erdoğan's foreign policy is its increasing militarization, which not only showcases Turkey's military capabilities and autonomy but also serves a symbolic purpose, reflecting a "futuristic approach to defending the nation."<sup>653</sup> While militarization can be seen as a peculiarity throughout the centenary of the Turkish Republic, a "new type of militarism" seems to have emerged. As Ahmet Kasim Han highlights, drones have "transcended their traditional role as mere weaponry, evolving into symbols of national competence and autonomy, fostering a robust sense of pride and self-reliance among the populace."<sup>654</sup> This has been part of a broader strategy of "techno-nationalism," where technological prowess is linked directly to national security, economic growth, and societal stability.<sup>655</sup> In this sense, the militarization of foreign policy has also had a regime-boosting effect, generating a "rally-round-the-flag" phenomenon that bolsters support for Erdoğan and the AKP among nationalist constituencies.<sup>656</sup> This effect is particularly significant in a context marked by economic challenges and social polarization, where demonstrations of military strength can help to consolidate the regime's legitimacy and deflect criticism from domestic issues. For instance, recent operations where the Turkish army has heavily used home-grown technologies garnered around 70% overall support, reflecting broad approval across political lines.<sup>657</sup>

All of this is supportive not only of concepts such as the *Yeni Türkiye* but also of a continuous rebranding approach according to pragmatic political necessities and choices, as in the case of the

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<sup>651</sup> Taş, 2022.

<sup>652</sup> Yeşiltaş, M., & Pirinççi, F. (2021). Turkey's Strategic Conduct under the Changing International System. *Insight Turkey*, 23(Fall 2021), 130.

<sup>653</sup> Idem, 131.

<sup>654</sup> Hwang & Song, 2022.

<sup>655</sup> The popularity of Bayraktar drones, highlighted in viral videos, has elevated figures like Selçuk Bayraktar to the status of national heroes, reinforcing the regime's legitimacy. Teknofests, such as those held across various Turkish cities, serve as platforms to promote this techno-nationalism—a pride in technology that strengthens the government's domestic support and showcases its prowess abroad. Images of Erdoğan signing a Bayraktar drone at an aerospace festival symbolize Turkey's "unstoppable rise" and inspire young minds with national pride. See Borsari, F. (2022). Turkey's drone diplomacy: Lessons for Europe. *ECFR*; (Farooq, 2019); Soyaltin-Colella & Demiryol, 2023.

<sup>656</sup> Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, 33.

<sup>657</sup> Neset et al., 2021, 15.

AKP's alliance with the MHP. For example, neo-Ottomanism seems to have resorted to a security-focused rhetoric that frames both internal and external forces as obstacles to Turkey's ambition of becoming a 'great' power by depicting domestic opponents, such as the CHP, as aligned with external adversaries seeking to hinder Turkey's rise.<sup>658</sup> For instance, the AKP has also challenged the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which defines Turkey's current borders, particularly in relation to disputes with Greece over the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>659</sup> Ege describes this stance as revisionist: "In principle, this should also lead to a reconfiguration of the current borders, (and this) has not been heard before."<sup>660</sup> Likewise, the concept of the New Turkey has been crucial in justifying the AKP's authoritarian restructuring of the political regime. As Yılmaz, Caman, and Bashirov argue, this narrative has influenced not only the public but also some opposition elites, including those within the CHP and IYI Party. By exploiting the opposition's reluctance to appear as supporting the July 15 failed coup or endorsing the perception of Turkey as submissive to the West<sup>661</sup>, the AKP has led the opposition to a "subconscious legitimization" of Turkey's authoritarian shift.

A similar process has also occurred with the (geo)political current of Eurasianism, a significant element in Turkey's foreign policy that did not originate with the AKP.<sup>662</sup> As it had long been present in Turkish politics, particularly within nationalist and Kemalist circles,<sup>663</sup> Bilgin notes that Eurasianism functions as a "vague or 'umbrella term' whose very ambiguity seems to have allowed for coalitions to be formed among otherwise unlikely fellows."<sup>664</sup> In this sense, as Tanrısever suggests, today, Turkish Eurasianism should be "seen as a pragmatic approach in foreign policy, used by various actors to advance their interests."<sup>665</sup> Following the coup attempt in 2016, Erdoğan and his

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<sup>658</sup> Ege, 2022, 12

<sup>659</sup> After the 2016 failed coup, emphasizing that in 2016, it cannot be acted on with the psychology of 1923 and that insisting on this will be the greatest injustice to the country and the nation, President Erdoğan stated that while everything is changing in the world, protecting the position on that date cannot be seen as a gain. Reminding that the War of Independence was won with the strategy of "there is no line of defense, there is defense, that is the whole homeland [...]. Although we have won our independence with this understanding, we are obliged to leave behind the understanding that forced us to spend our entire history of the Republic with the defense of the line. Whatever happened to us for 93 years came from this understanding. As a matter of fact, when we look back, we see that we could not act without knocking on the problem door, without the knife resting on the bone, and without being buried up to our larynx in the swamp. For this reason, if you pay attention, our door was never empty, we never had a period when we breathed easily, and we paid great prices every term." See TCCB. (2016, October 19). "*Bu Ülkede Artık Kimsenin Yaptığı İhanet Yanına Kâr Kalmayacak.*" <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/55684/bu-ulkede-artik-kimsenin-yaptigi-ihayet-yanina-kr-kalmayacak>.

<sup>660</sup> Ege, 2022, 12.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>662</sup> Its ideological roots lie in the ideas of Turkism and pan-Turkism, which influenced nationalist and Kemalist groups throughout the 20th century, promoting a pro-Russian stance in foreign policy while combining socialist and nationalist elements. The resurgence of Eurasianism in Turkey, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was a response to the country's diminished strategic importance to the West, prompting a reevaluation of its foreign policy orientation. Bilgin, P. (2012). Turkey's geopolitical dogma. In S. Guzzini (Ed.), *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?: Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press; Atmaca & Turun, 2022.

<sup>663</sup> Yanık, 2019, 45.

<sup>664</sup> Bilgin, 2012, 162.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>665</sup> Tanrısever, O. (2018). Discourses and Politics of Eurasianism in Turkey during the 2000s'. In V. Talbot (Ed.), *Turkey: Towards a Eurasian Shift?* Ledizioni, 13.



party, who had previously maintained close ties with Turkish liberals, began to align more closely with Eurasianist and Turkish nationalist groups, forming an anti-Western coalition that also included Islamists, ultranationalists, and Eurasianists.<sup>666</sup> This coalition helped to strengthen the AKP's narrative of independence from the West. Erdoğan, for example, declared, “July 15 has become one of the symbols of our national history just like the Victory of Manzikert, the Conquest of Istanbul, and the August 30 Victory along with the foundation of the Seljuk and Ottoman states and our Republic”.<sup>667</sup> This discourse positions Turkey's recent history as a continuation of its Ottoman past, suggesting a moral high ground against Western actions. İbrahim Kalın, spokesperson for the Turkish Presidency, has provocatively stated

First, they started the Gezi events, then the 17–25 December events, and finally, when the PKK failed, the July 15 military coup. Why is that? It is because Turkey is now in a position where it questions the international system and argues that this system does not produce justice.<sup>668</sup>

At the same time, when the targeted audience is also outside of national border, religious-based discourses seem to leave room for more nationalistic tones. A case in point is the Turkey's reaction to the ebbs and flows concerning the refugee deal with the EU in 2016, when Erdogan stated “If the EU is going to give that money, then they should do it. The Turkish nation has pride, and they can't toy with that pride.”<sup>669</sup> Seemingly, Erdogan portrayed the purchase of the S-400 defense system from Russia in the context of Turkey's sovereignty and autonomy.<sup>670</sup> All of these moves are frequently reinforced by his slogan, “The world is bigger than five,” which criticizes the perceived dominance of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and advocates for a more equitable global order.<sup>671</sup> This theme is elaborated in his book, “A Fairer World is Possible,” where he argues for restructuring international institutions to better reflect global realities and fairness, positioning Turkey as a leader in this effort.<sup>672</sup> This vision was echoed in the AKP's 2023 electoral manifesto, which articulated the concept of the “Century of Türkiye” (*Türkiye Yüzyılı*), promoting Turkey's role as a rising power that seeks to balance global power dynamics and champion a just international order. This also has practical implications. The “Asia Anew” initiative, launched in 2019, illustrates this

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<sup>666</sup> Çolakoglu & Aras, 2022.

<sup>667</sup> TCCB. (2017, July 12). “July 15 Has Become One of the Symbols of Our National History.” <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/78898/sokakta-aranan-adaletin-adi-intikamdir-sonu-da-vandalliktir>.

<sup>668</sup> Kalın, I. (2017, October 26). FETÖ'cileri Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne İade Etsinler. *Milliyet*.

<sup>669</sup> Dursun-Özkanca, O. (Ed.). (2019). The EU–Turkey Deal on Refugees. In *Turkey–West Relations: The Politics of Intra-alliance Opposition* (pp. 83–97). Cambridge University Press; Cambridge Core, 90.

<sup>670</sup> BBC Türkçe. (2019, July 10). S-400 – Erdoğan: Mesele Doğrudan Egemenlik Haklarımızla İlgilidir, Geri Adım Atmayacağız. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-48756983>.

<sup>671</sup> Aral, B. (2019). “The World is Bigger than Five”: A Salutary Manifesto of Turkey's New International Outlook. *Insight Turkey*, 21(4).

<sup>672</sup> Available in English. Erdoğan, R. T. (2021). A fairer world is possible: A proposed model for a United Nations reform. *Turkuvaz Kitap*.

shift towards a more Eurasianist orientation. It aims to strengthen Turkey's ties with Asia amid deteriorating relations and a sense of alienation with the US and the EU.<sup>673</sup>

The timing of many initiatives that appear to be “irrational” reflects the AKP's strategic use of Eurasianism to bolster Turkey's autonomy in its foreign policy while countering Western pressure. The AKP's partnership with Russia, heavily supported by Eurasianist factions, allows the government to maintain an independent foreign policy narrative against Western influence. Despite their secular-nationalist origins, Eurasianists share a “strong anti-western geopolitical identity and a willingness to use unilateral hard power in pursuit of a particular interpretation of national interests,” which aligns them with the AKP, the MHP, and key military figures.<sup>674</sup> The “Blue Homeland Doctrine (*Mavi Vatan*), advocated by Eurasianist generals, is a direct manifestation of this alliance, calling for assertive military policies to protect Turkey's interests in the Mediterranean and beyond.<sup>675</sup> In general, while these signifiers remain concepts of great influence, Aydıntaşbaş suggests terms like “Erdoğanism” and the notion of a “Turkish *Sonderweg*” as defining features of Turkey's foreign policy<sup>676</sup> to explain why, despite its ideological stances, Erdoğan and his AKP demonstrated how political realities and national self-interest force the party into working directly with its supposed enemies including Israel and the United States. Despite portraying himself and his party as a defender of the ummah worldwide, “the Turkish government and pro-government media carefully refrained from any public criticism of Trump's Islamophobic statements or travel ban on Muslims.”<sup>677</sup> Nor has the Turkish government taken a stand against China's brutal treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang province but instead sought to please China by signing “an extradition treaty opening the way for Uighurs in Turkey to be deported to China.”<sup>678</sup> Turkey's friendly relationship with Hungary – which is governed by a right-wing populist party that claims that Muslim immigration to Europe is destroying Christian civilization – and Erdoğan's “close friendship” with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán,<sup>679</sup> also demonstrate that “at times, political pragmatism and national self-interest are ultimately more important to the AKP than protecting the ummah at every opportunity.”<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> Tanrısever, 2022.

<sup>674</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2022.

<sup>675</sup> For an account of how Blue Homeland Doctrine of Eurasianist generals influence Turkish foreign policy, see Gingeras, R. (2020). *Blue Homeland: The Heated Politics Behind Turkey's New Maritime Strategy. War on the Rocks*.

<sup>676</sup> Aydıntaşbaş, 2020, 6.

<sup>677</sup> Akkoyunlu 2021.

<sup>678</sup> Idem.

<sup>679</sup> Kutlay & Öniş, 2022.

<sup>680</sup> Yilmaz & Morieson, 2023, 12.

## 7.4. IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

While this thesis was conceived well before the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza erupted in 2022 and 2023, and when the fall of the Assad regime and the internal turmoils in Turkey could hardly be foreseen, the consequences of these events on global, regional, and national dynamics cannot be overlooked, especially when considering their relevance *for* and *of* Turkey in such contexts. Therefore, this section stems from three primary considerations. First, the choice of not investigating deeper into these aspects earlier throughout the core of the thesis is related to the fact that the events are under continuous development at the time of writing. This implies not only a lack of resources compared to the other issues analyzed in this project but also the risk of tracing misleading correlations or reaching premature conclusions. Second, despite this risk, the developments affecting TFP between early 2023 and early 2025 are not situated in a vacuum. Rather, they appear to be a continuation and a drastic, fast-paced consequence of trends that were already set in motion in the past years. Third, there is also somehow a personal choice behind this consideration, prompted by a suggestion of a former Turkish high-ranked diplomat, who told the author: “You should feel free to include in your analysis your take on the latest developments [...] because, you know, you might know what happened yesterday in Turkish Foreign Policy but you never know what can happen tomorrow.” As such, what follows is an analysis that tries to connect the final part of chapter 7 with the latest developments regarding TFP and, in light of this thesis’s theoretical framework, their connection with Turkey’s external, internal, and individual levels.

### 7.4.1. The War in Ukraine: “Proactive Neutrality” or Dependence?

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a significant point of rupture in an already evolving and unclear international order with far-reaching global and regional implications.<sup>1</sup> For global powers, as well as for a wider array of actors, the invasion has intensified existing geopolitical rivalries and reshaped or at least questioned international alliances. On the one hand, it triggered a robust and unified response from the EU and the West in general, which had previously shown signs of fragmentation due to Brexit and the erratic foreign policy of the Trump administration. Indeed, “the transatlantic alliance found new cohesion against Russian aggression,

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<sup>1</sup> Alcaro, R., & Dijkstra, H. (2024). Re-imagining EU Foreign and Security Policy in a Complex and Contested World. *The International Spectator*, 59(1), 1–18; Heidi Maurer, Kolja Raube & Richard G. Whitman (2024) “Zeitenwende” as coming of age? EU foreign & security policy through war & peace, *European Security*, 33:3, 345-363.

demonstrated by the swift and extensive sanctions imposed on Russia – far exceeding those seen in earlier conflicts, such as the Georgian War in 2008 or the annexation of Crimea in 2014.”<sup>2</sup> Major Western democracies, alongside their Asian allies (such as the G7 countries), responded with a coordinated effort that included military and economic support for Ukraine, as well as significant increases in defense spending. The importance of NATO as a collective defense organization has been revitalized, and the EU’s efforts towards a “geopolitical agenda” have speeded up as member states reaffirmed their commitments to mutual security and greater military collaboration. This is because, from the Western perspective, Russia was identified as a “rogue state,” and the sanctions aimed to isolate it from the rest of the world while applying pressure on the Putin regime.

On the other hand, however, the Western response was not universally supported. Many countries “outside the West” and in the Global South viewed the conflict as a response to NATO’s expansionism, with Putin’s actions sometimes seen as partly justified.<sup>3</sup> Instead of aligning with Western moves to isolate Moscow, these countries adopted a pragmatic approach, seeking to leverage the opportunities created by the sanctions to enhance their own trade, investment, and energy relations with Russia.<sup>4</sup> The conflict’s impact on the MENA region was particularly complex, affecting countries politically, economically, and socially. The war exacerbated food insecurity and economic instability, as the region relied heavily on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia. Nonetheless, many MENA states adopted a strategy of “hedging” or neutrality, avoiding a clear stance against Russia, contrary to how some Western capitals would have expected.<sup>5</sup> According to Szalai, this approach reflects a broader trend of pragmatism and autonomy, where regional actors sought to balance their ties with competing powers while maximizing their political and economic interests.<sup>6</sup>

Turkey, a NATO member with deep economic and strategic ties to Russia, found itself in a particularly intricate position. It adopted a stance that combined elements of Western-leaning policies with a strategic alignment more akin to those of global South countries. For example, Ankara condemned Russia’s invasion at the UN General Assembly but avoided more confrontational language or direct criticism of Putin. This approach allowed it to maintain relations with Russia while simultaneously preserving its standing within NATO and continuing the military and economic

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<sup>2</sup> Öniş, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> For a very critical position, see Cafruny, A., Fouskas, V. K., Mallinson, W. D. E., & Voynitsky, A. (2023). Ukraine, Multipolarity and the Crisis of Grand Strategies. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 1–21.

<sup>4</sup> Szalai, M. (2023). Between Hedging and Bandwagoning – Interpreting the Reactions of Middle Eastern and North African States to the Russian-Ukrainian War. *Euromesco*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Kuik, C.-C. (2016). How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN states’ alignment behavior towards China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25(100), 502.

<sup>6</sup> As Szalai (2023) further observes, “hedging involves a balancing act between maintaining leverage and security in an uncertain environment, where the outcome of a conflict or competition is unclear.”

partnership that began in 2014 with Kyiv.<sup>7</sup> In line with the concept of “strategic autonomy” outlined above, Turkey has sought to weight its relationships with both Russia and Ukraine to maximize its strategic gains while maintaining its alignment with Western institutions by following its desire to assert its regional influence without becoming overly dependent on any single bloc. While some pro-governmental circles labeled it as “active neutrality,”<sup>8</sup> others described Turkey’s stance as “non-binary,” stressing how “Erdoğan’s stance has been pro-Ukrainian but not anti-Russian, enabling him to strike a delicate balance between NATO expectations, Moscow’s economic lifeline, and domestic political pressures.”<sup>9</sup> In practical terms, Turkey has leveraged its unique position to act as a mediator and facilitator of dialogue. In the early phases of the conflict, it condemned Russia’s invasion and leveraged the 1936 Montreux Convention to close the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to most Russian military vessels, and also hosted peace talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations at the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul. Furthermore, Turkey played a crucial role in brokering the grain corridor deal during the summer of 2022, which allowed Ukrainian exports to resume from Black Sea ports, alleviating a global food crisis exacerbated by the war. At the same time, Turkey’s supply of drones and other military equipment to Ukraine had a double-faceted strategic impact. First, it allowed Ukraine to resist the earliest Russian attack and boosted Turkey’s military exports thanks to the increased popularity of its homemade drones. Second, it strengthened Ankara’s position within NATO, both in terms of strategic value and bargaining processes.

However, Turkey’s position has not been entirely consistent with Western policies. While Ankara condemned Russia’s actions at the UN, it refrained from imposing sanctions against Russia, considering it would have been a “suicide” due to its dramatic domestic economy and dependence on Russian energy and agricultural commodities.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the Russia-Turkey energy collaboration reached a new level in October 2022 following a summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, between Putin and Erdoğan. The Russian leader proposed turning Turkey into a central gas hub to export Russian natural gas to Europe, especially after Nord Stream 1 and 2 for the transportation of Russian gas to Germany became no longer reliable.<sup>11</sup> Financially, several Turkish banks adopted the Russian Mir payments

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<sup>7</sup> Dost, P. (2024, May 3). The Ukraine-Turkey defense partnership with the potential to transform Black Sea and Euro-Atlantic security. *Atlantic Council*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/turkeysources/the-ukraine-turkey-defense-partnership-with-the-potential-to-transform-black-sea-and-euro-atlantic-security/>

<sup>8</sup> Gozkaman, A. (2022). Türkiye’s Foreign Policy vis-a-vis the War in Ukraine: A New Version of Active Neutrality. *Perceptions (Ankara, Turkey)*, 27(2), 159–176.

<sup>9</sup> Çağaptay, S. (2023). Unpacking Turkey’s Non-Binary Ukraine War Policy. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in the first six months following the start of the war, Turkey doubled its imports of Russian oil, increasing from 90,000 to 200,000 barrels per day. Additionally, Russia transferred \$5 billion to Turkey in July 2022 to expedite the construction of a nuclear power plant, further boosting Turkey’s currency reserves. Despite these diplomatic efforts, Turkey chose not to enforce Western-led sanctions, becoming a refuge for Russian oligarchs to safeguard their assets and leading to an influx of Russian and Ukrainian property buyers, significantly impacting its real estate market. See Cheterian, 2023, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

system, an alternative to Swift which is suspended in Russia, in September 2022.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in July 2022, Russia transferred \$5 billion to speed up the construction of the Turkish nuclear power plant in Akkuyu, a project that made many Western capitals raise eyebrows.<sup>13</sup>

Still, Turkey's proactive role not only had significant implications for the war and many countries dependent on Russia's supplies but also "bolstered Erdoğan's standing both at home and abroad, reinforcing the image of Turkey as a crucial player in regional stability and an indispensable interlocutor between Russia and the West."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in continuity with trends preceding the war, Turkey managed to exploit its NATO membership to pursue what the government defined as its national and security interests and what others see as an attempt "to heal the scars of its international isolation."<sup>15</sup> For others, however, it is possible to argue that its relations with the US and Russia have also become much more submissive. In particular, Turkey's relations with the US and Russia could be seen as a perfect example of "antagonistic cooperation," in which a country pursues autonomy and challenges the agendas of the big powers by implementing its own foreign policy objectives but without necessarily breaking completely with other major powers. However, for some, this indicated that "on a closer look [...] Turkey has indeed lost its capacity for bargaining due to its incoherent and inconsistent foreign policy strategies caused by the structural transformation and deterioration of its economy."<sup>16</sup> A striking example is Ankara's active opposition to the inclusion of Sweden and Finland into NATO, about which some have lamented that "it [was] difficult to understand what Turkey wanted."<sup>17</sup> On one side, the Turkish government appeared strong at home and abroad at the negotiation table since its veto was removed only after having received assurance against its earlier accusations to these countries of protecting and supporting Kurdish terrorists against Turkey's security. However, this might also signal Turkey's increasing dependence on NATO and the US for assurances of the continuity of NATO support, especially considering that Ankara had to cut down on its demands to be reinstated into the F-35 program and accept the modernization of the Turkish F-16 fighter jets in return.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Idem.

<sup>13</sup> Kozok, F. (2022, July 29). Russia is Wiring Dollars to Turkey for \$20 Billion Nuclear Plant. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-29/russia-is-wiring-dollars-to-turkey-for-20-billionnuclear-plant>.

<sup>14</sup> Öniş, 2023, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a diplomat at the EU.

<sup>16</sup> Erol, E. (2024). The Decline of Turkey as a Subimperialist Power: Political Economy of the Turkish Foreign Policy under AKP Rule. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> On these dynamics, the author had the opportunity to participate in closed meetings with Swedish counterparts who were present during the negotiation process.

<sup>18</sup> Following the green light given to the modernization of Turkish F-16 fighter jets, in April 2023, Turkey dropped its objection to Sweden's accession to NATO membership, claiming that Sweden was finally taking the necessary steps towards fighting terrorism." Erol, 2024, 10.

Seemingly, while post-2015 relations between Russia and Turkey have often been described as “geopolitical alignment” and “strategic,” these latest developments reveal that, although they may cooperate on certain issues, their relationship is more transactional and short-term than genuinely strategic, thus far from long-term collaboration on shared core interests and values.<sup>19</sup> However, the fact that Russia and Turkey have managed to both compete and collaborate where it suits their interests highlights a “paradoxical relationship” that can be better understood by contemplating their shared view of the West as a common threat driven by Western policies that both nations perceive as obstacles to their ambitions on the global stage.<sup>20</sup> As Hill and Taşpınar “prophesized” a decade ago, the Turkish-Russian relationship is “less about mutual interests and more about a shared sense of exclusion by the West.”<sup>21</sup> As highlighted in this thesis, over the past decade, elites in both Ankara and Moscow have increasingly viewed the West as a significant threat, contributing to a convergence in their foreign policies. This anti-Western sentiment, fueled by media narratives highlighting historical grievances, has been exacerbated by perceptions of a declining West after the US disengagement from many regional scenarios. Ultimately, this ambiguity towards Russia has contributed to halting the chances of deeper strategic cooperation between Turkey and Ukraine as well. Indeed, this has led to public and political backlash in Ukraine, with allegations of complicity in Russia’s actions, including the theft of Ukrainian grain. While Turkey’s position as a NATO member initially allowed Ukraine to cope with the Russian aggression, the war has forced Kyiv to reassess Turkey’s foreign policy, leading to a more cautious and pragmatic partnership.<sup>22</sup> What still holds true is that, despite the tensions, Turkey remains an essential intermediary in the Ukraine-Russia-West triangle due to its unique ability to engage with all sides. However, its reliability as an ally will likely continue to be questioned by both Ukraine and its Western partners, especially in light of the debates in the EU and the US regarding the forms and extent of military aid to Kyiv.

#### **7.4.2. The MENA Region and Gaza: Normalization or Renewed Regional Competition?**

A similar pattern involving international balancing, regional dynamics, and internal considerations concerns Turkey’s diplomatic maneuvers in the MENA since 2020-2021. Indeed, Turkey’s recent push to normalize relations with its neighbors after a decade of turbulence can be

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<sup>19</sup> Cheterian, 2023, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Aydın-Düzgüt & Noutcheva, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Hill, & Taşpınar. 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Çağaptay, 2022.

explained by several elements. First, the election of US President Biden in 2021 was parallel with the Abraham Accords that normalized relations between Israel and several Arab states, the reconciliation between Gulf monarchies and Qatar in early 2021 after a years-long blockade, and Turkey's growing concerns over increasing energy and military cooperation among Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, Israel, and some Arab states in the Eastern Mediterranean. Simultaneously, Erdoğan's domestic political needs played a crucial role in driving this foreign policy recalibration. Facing severe economic challenges, including inflation rates soaring to over 73% in 2022, Erdoğan needed to secure new sources of investment and economic partnerships to stabilize the Turkish economy ahead of the 2023 presidential and 2024 municipal elections. This was critical not only for his political survival but also to regain support from former AKP supporters who had grown disillusioned with the government's handling of the economy.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Turkey's reshaped engagement in the MENA region is also deeply rooted in a desire to relaunch its regional prestige. It has already been highlighted how Erdoğan's appeal to many Arab Islamists has always been driven by a mix of ideology and strategic interests. However, as Gönül Tol notes, there is a striking difference compared to the AKP's appeal to the Muslim masses a decade ago. Now

[the Turkish government] remarks are not just directed at the Arab street anymore, they are directed at the region's autocrats and call for their help in resolving regional problems. [Foreign Minister] Fidan sounds much like Davutoglu before the Arab uprisings. So [...] Turkey has not made a full circle in its relations with the region. Pre-Arab uprisings Turkey is not there anymore. Despite having normalized its ties with regional foes, Ankara now has a heavy Arab uprisings baggage, which will always color the way regional autocrats see Erdogan. For the Arab street, Erdogan is still popular but he is not this Muslim leader who presides over an economically strong, democratic country that is well-regarded in Western capitals and has a success story to tell Muslim youth.<sup>24</sup>

Still, as Danforth and Stein suggest, Turkey has been trying to capitalize on the fact that it remains seen as “a strong and serious country capable of causing a lot of problems for rivals if it wanted to,” a view that has encouraged rapprochement efforts since 2020-21.<sup>25</sup> In practical terms, the process included high-profile meetings, such as the visit of UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed to Turkey in November 2021, where he announced a \$10 billion fund to support investments. Erdoğan's reciprocal visit in February 2022 saw the signing of several agreements in defense, trade, and technology, marking a significant thaw in relations. After years of severe relations characterized

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<sup>23</sup> On this, see Aksoy, H. A., & Roll, S. (2021). A thaw in relations between Egypt and Turkey: Weaknesses in foreign policy and the economy bring the regimes in Cairo and Ankara closer together. *SWP Comment*; Roll, S. (2023). Egypt, Saudia Arabia and the UAE: End of an alliance: divergences of interest in bilateral relations offer opportunities for Germany and the EU. *SWP Comment*.

<sup>24</sup> Tol, G. (n.d.). Turkish FM Fidan is in Cairo attending the Arab League meeting... *X*. <https://x.com/gonultol/status/1833504054728691815>.

<sup>25</sup> Danforth, N., & Stein, A. (2023). Turkey's New Foreign Policy: Ankara's Ambitions, Regional Responses, and Implications for the United States. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*.



by harsh rhetoric and economic boycotts, Turkey managed to mend the fences with Saudi Arabia as well. In this context, Ryad provided a \$5 billion lifeline deposit to Turkey's Central Bank that allowed the Turkish government to implement tactical economic reforms right before the 2023 elections.<sup>26</sup> Normalization with Egypt, although slower, has also seen substantial progress, including restoring diplomatic relations in 2023 after a decade of estrangement. This also resulted in extremely difficult but prolonged efforts to normalize relations with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, despite historical antagonism and recent years' confrontations. Nonetheless, as few observers could foresee, the eruption of the conflict in Gaza since October 2023 and the sudden fall of the Assad Regime contributed to speeding up the regional restructuring process.

First, the war in Gaza has not only been catastrophic for civilians but has also strained regional stability, testing existing alliances and compelling states to reassess their positions. As Krieg notes, the unequivocal support by the US and many Western countries for Israel has further strained relations with regional actors, undermining the legitimacy of the existing regional order and empowering non-state actors and informal networks. As such, the conflict has intensified existing tensions and led to the emergence of what Krieg describes as a "spontaneous order"<sup>27</sup>, intended as a decentralized and less structured environment that is not characterized by the domination of a single state or bloc, but by the cumulative actions of state and non-state actors interacting dynamically with one another. In other words, the Gaza War illustrates the powerlessness of traditional state actors to effectively manage regional entities and the inability of even great powers to shape regional dynamics in a meaningful way. From Ankara's view, the war has provided both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the conflict has allowed Turkey to reaffirm its support for the Palestinian cause and position itself as a leading Muslim voice in regional diplomacy. This reinforced the ideas in the governmental circles that "Turkey could represent the voice of the non-West within the West."<sup>28</sup> This stance has bolstered Turkey's image among certain segments of the Muslim world and Turkish society as a defender of Palestinian rights and a critic of Western policies. As Dalacoura notes, in the MENA region, Turkey is widely perceived as "a resurgent Muslim power posing a long-awaited challenge to the regional status quo underpinned by US military power and regimes who survive

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<sup>26</sup> Reuters. (2023, March 6). Saudi Arabia deposits \$5 bln in Turkey's central bank—Statement.

<sup>27</sup> According to him, it is a networked order of entanglement in which there is no space for a hegemon, where no one node is so disproportionately more powerful than the next one that it can impose its will. The order is also far less stratified than it was assumed to be in the 1990s. And while Russia wants us to believe in a multipolar order, the Middle East widely appears to be apolar today as real poles of power in the region do not permanently exist – neither in Moscow, Beijing, or Washington nor in Tehran, Riyadh, or Ankara. In each conflict in the region, power dynamics appear to be extremely volatile, whereby a pole in one conflict might not be a pole in another. See Krieg, A. (2024). The war in Gaza, the decline of US leadership, and the emergence of a networked regional order. *Mediterranean Politics*, 1–10.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with an expert close to governmental circles.

through a policy of appeasing Washington” or “the only Muslim country that stands against the West.”<sup>29</sup> Western criticisms of Turkey are frequently associated with frustration over Ankara’s aspirations to follow an independent path. Turkey’s economic and soft power visibility across the region, increased people-to-people contacts, and Ankara’s more assertive foreign policy all shape these perceptions.<sup>30</sup> However, Dalacoura also notes how while the AKP maintains a close relationship with Hamas, “interpreting Turkey’s broader support for the Palestinians and its criticism of Israeli policies solely through the lens of Islamist ideology would be overly simplistic.”<sup>31</sup> This is because advocacy for Palestinian self-determination and opposition to Israeli occupation and settlement activities is not confined to Islamists in the Middle East; these positions are also shared by individuals on the left of the political spectrum and centrist liberals. While religious affinity may have intensified Turkey’s critiques of Israel, it did not originate them. Additionally, Turkey has fostered relations with the Palestinian Authority, showing that its support is not exclusive to Hamas.<sup>32</sup>

This is related to the fact that there are also strategic reasons for the AKP’s backing of the Palestinian cause, which is closely tied to Erdoğan’s ambition to position himself as a leader in the Muslim world, where the Palestinian issue remains a significant concern, at least rhetorically. In recent years, as Gulf states have shifted their focus to view Iran, rather than Israel, as their primary adversary, Turkey has increasingly adopted the role of a defender of Palestinian rights. This stance has sometimes strained its relations with the United States, particularly during the Trump administration, which maintained strong ties with Israel but also created room for regional maneuver. However, Turkey’s influence has been constrained by its economic and strategic limitations, “as well as by the perception that its stance on the conflict is not genuine but instrumental for its national

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<sup>29</sup> TRT. (2020). *How Arabs Perceive Turkey’s Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-arabs-perceive-turkey-s-foreignpolicy-in-the-middle-east-40415>; Cogan, K. (n.d.). Istanbul, Home to the New Arab World. *Le Monde Diplomatique*. <https://monde.diplo.com/2021/06/07istanbul>. A journalist told the author, “Ankara seems to have acquired over the years the reputation of a country willing and able to play hardball with Western powers.”

<sup>30</sup> Dalacoura, 2021, 113. Dalacoura also reports that, at a “Thank you, Turkey” meeting organized by Arab Islamists in Istanbul in 2016, for instance, Khalid Meshaal, the former leader of Hamas, praised Turkey for presenting “the best example of political Islam in democracy, governance, and economy. At the same meeting, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian scholar of Islam and former chairperson of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, who passed away in 2022, also expressed his gratitude to Erdoğan and Turkey for defending Islam and the causes of Arab and Muslim nations. In 2018, representatives of Arab communities in Turkey called on Arabs and Muslims within and outside Turkey to support the Turkish economy. They asserted that the currency crisis severely affecting Turkey had been “orchestrated by external actors that were unhappy with Turkey’s rise to regional power status and with its support for the Arab uprisings”. Two years later, Erdoğan was celebrated at an event organized in 2020 by the Union of Arab Communities in Turkey as “the leader of the Islamic nation, who made sacrifices and stood against the forces of tyranny in the name of the 1.3 billion Muslims.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Hale, W. (2015). Reassessing Turkey’s Relationships with Its Neighbours. In M. S. Michael (Ed.), *Reconciling Cultural and Political Identities in a Globalized World: Perspectives on Australia-Turkey Relations* (pp. 185–209). Palgrave Macmillan UK. But it may also be that ‘the decline of the secularist ethos’ in both Turkey and Israel, and the rise of ultra-nationalism and religious politics, have had a negative impact on bilateral relations: see Uzer, U. (2019). The New Jew and the New Turk: A Comparative Analysis of Israeli and Turkish Nation-Building Within the Framework of Religion, Modernity and Secularism. In A. Sever & O. Almog (Eds.), *Contemporary Israeli–Turkish Relations in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 11–38). Springer International Publishing.

objectives.”<sup>33</sup> This might be linked to the fact that, under the AKP, Turkey has consistently positioned itself as a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, both rhetorically and materially, while maintaining pragmatic relations with Israel.<sup>34</sup> Examples of this issue are abundant at the individual level, where there is a narrative framing Turkey as the starting point for the liberation of Muslim nations.<sup>35</sup> This perspective was evident in Turkey’s immediate reaction to the October 7 events, when President Erdoğan reiterated that Ankara sees Hamas as a “patriotic liberation movement defending Palestinian lands and people.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Turkey’s civilizational approach to the conflict has also been pronounced within national borders, where Erdoğan criticized the West for disregarding human rights, stating that “the blood being spilled is Muslim blood.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, there is no doubt that this dual approach has enabled Turkey to project itself as a defender of Muslim rights and a critic of Western colonialism and Islamophobia while simultaneously engaging in practical diplomacy and economic partnerships with Israel and securing its position in the eyes of its Western allies.

Trying to leverage its position, since the onset of the latest conflict, Turkey has made efforts to position itself as a mediator. Early in the war, Ankara proposed a guarantee system involving international forces and regional actors. However, these efforts were largely sidelined as countries like Qatar and Egypt assumed more prominent parts in negotiating ceasefires and providing humanitarian assistance. It is true that Turkey was asked by the US to speak with Hamas people, but the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran “denied Erdogan his diplomatic trump card.”<sup>38</sup>

As Sezin Öney noted, “It is more conveying a message to their own base, [...] there isn't an audience that really sees Turkey or Erdogan as the vanguard of Palestine rights anymore. On the contrary, that ship sailed long ago.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Turkey’s reaction to the Gaza War also highlighted the internal contradictions in its foreign policy. While Turkey has harshly criticized Israel’s actions and accused Western states of hypocrisy, it has continued to maintain economic relations with Israel,

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<sup>33</sup> Conversation with a journalist. Indeed, until Turkey’s rapprochement efforts began in 2022, diplomatic relations with Israel oscillated between reconciliation attempts (such as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s apology for the Gaza flotilla incident) and sporadic tensions (for example over alleged Turkish involvement in the exposure of Israeli agents in Iran or the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador in 2018 in protest at Israel’s killing of Palestinians demonstrating against the US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel). Although Ankara’s diplomatic ties with Israel deteriorated, economic relations remained constant.

<sup>34</sup> See Adar, S. (2023, November 1). Turkey’s Response to the War in Gaza. *War on the Rocks*.

<sup>35</sup> Erdoğan has actively promoted this viewpoint, exemplified by his portrayal of the 2020 conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque as a “precursor to the liberation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.” TCCB. (2020, July 10). “*With its new status, Hagia Sophia, the shared heritage of humanity, will continue to embrace all.*” <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/120584/-with-its-new-status-hagia-sophia-the-shared-heritage-of-humanity-will-continue-to-embrace-all->.

<sup>36</sup> Zaman, A. (2023, October 25). Turkey’s Erdoğan Hails Hamas as Liberators. *Al-Monitor*. <https://www.almonitor.com/originals/2023/10/turkeys-Erdoğan-hails-hamasliberators-leaving-detente-israel-shreds>.

<sup>37</sup> Aile Şurası. (2023, October 26). Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’ın 8. Aile Şurası Konuşması 26 Ekim 2023. *You Tube*. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkvYZM0adl4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkvYZM0adl4).

<sup>38</sup> Soli Özel’s reflection reported in RFI. (2024, September 28). *Erdogan’s anti-Israel rhetoric falters as Turkey loses regional clout*. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/podcasts/international-report/20240928-erdogan-anti-israel-rhetoric-falters-as-turkey-loses-regional-clout>.

<sup>39</sup> Idem.

underscoring the pragmatism that often underlies its more ideologically driven rhetoric. This duality has, at times, diluted Turkey's influence, as regional actors perceive its policies as inconsistent or opportunistic.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, critical voices argue that “without decisive influence on the region's elites and with limited economic margins, Turkey is left only with rhetorical instruments.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, one could infer that there is a process where Turkish leadership's call for greater unity among Muslim countries against Israel goes hand in hand with its concrete needs to accelerate its ongoing regional normalization process. For instance, when the Egyptian President al-Sisi paid a visit to Turkey and signed numerous bilateral deals in September 2024, the government presented the agreement as “beneficial for Gaza and Palestine”<sup>42</sup> However, these efforts have also faced significant setbacks. Domestically, the AKP's ambiguous stance on Gaza has resulted in a loss of votes in the 2024 local elections, where some conservative votes shifted to the Islamist *Yeniden Refah Partisi* (New Welfare Party, YRP), reflecting public dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the conflict.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the Islamist right, the Gaza war is also stoking anti-NATO and anti-American sentiments among Turkey's hard-left secularists.<sup>44</sup> As Tokdemir et al. highlight, anti-American attitudes in Turkey are embraced by nearly all segments of Turkish society: secular, nationalist, leftist, and Islamist traditions can share anti-American attitudes with different motivations.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, this makes such dynamics subject to the government's exploitation to increase domestic consensus but also an additional perilous element that might make it more difficult for Turkey and the US to compromise on potential convergent interests.

Overall, in its region, Turkey's reputation remains tarnished. Challenges suggest that while Turkey has made significant strides in normalizing its relations by “agreeing to disagree with key regional players because of economic win-wins,” the process remains fraught with difficulties and contradictions.<sup>46</sup> However, to understand the Turkish government's moves, one should broaden the picture to “Ankara's genuine dissatisfaction towards the West as well as to its sly tactics to gain

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<sup>40</sup> In an expert survey recently conducted by ISPI, Turkey was listed among the countries that have played a “somewhat negative” role in “defusing tensions or bringing the two parties to the table.” ISPI. (2024, February 8). *Rome MED Dialogues Expert Survey: The Gaza War and Its Impact*. ISPI. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/rome-med-dialogues-expert-survey-the-gazawar-and-its-impact-163149#g5>.

<sup>41</sup> Conversation.

<sup>42</sup> TCCB. (2024, September 7). “*The only step that can stop Israel's state terrorism is the alliance of Islamic countries.*” <https://tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/153516/-the-only-step-that-can-stop-israel-s-state-terrorism-is-the-alliance-of-islamic-countries->.

<sup>43</sup> On the issue, see Abrami, S. C. A., & Gasco, R. (n.d.). *An Analysis of Turkish Municipal Elections. When Local Becomes National. Implications for Turkey's Political Future*. Geopolitica.info. <https://www.geopolitica.info/prodotto/geopolitical-brief-45-an-analysis-of-turkish-municipal-elections/>; Abrami, S. C. A., Gasco, R., & Esen, B. (2025). Turkey's 2024 municipal elections. A turning point for democratic resilience? *Mediterranean Politics*, 1–13.

<sup>44</sup> Also, to make an empirical example: in September 2024, two US Marines in the Western Turkish city of Izmir were attacked by members of the Turkey Youth Union (TGB), a youth branch of the nationalist opposition Vatan Party, according to local officials. The Marines were on a port visit as the USS Wasp warship patrols the eastern Mediterranean in a show of support for Israel.

<sup>45</sup> Tokdemir et al., 2024, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ünveren, B., & Azzam, I. (2024, March 9). How the Gaza war is bringing Turkey and Egypt together. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/israel-gaza-why-is-the-war-drawing-turkey-and-egypt-closer-to-one-another/a-70122505>.

something by exploiting tumultuous contexts.” On the one hand, Turkey vocally criticized the EU and the US for their perceived hypocrisy in offering unwavering support to Israel. This reinforced Ankara’s accusations of double standards that have consistently been accompanied by larger critiques of the international system’s inherent injustices.<sup>47</sup> For instance, in his speech at the 2023 annual meeting of Turkish ambassadors, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan referred to Erdogan’s two slogans – “the world is bigger than five” and “a more just world is possible” – as essential pillars of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>48</sup> Addressing the UNSC on 24 January and then in September 2024, he also noted that “the continuation of the current situation in Gaza will further undermine the fundamental principles and moral values of the international system.”<sup>49</sup>

#### 7.4.3. Post-Assad Syria: Inside-Out Risks and Opportunities<sup>50</sup>

Second, a scenario where Turkey seems to enjoy a more (potentially) favorable position is Syria. The swift downfall of Bashar al-Assad on December 7-8, 2024, led by the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), has redefined the regional balance of power, placing Turkey in a pivotal position to influence the country’s political future. While this has reinforced Ankara’s strategic ambitions and provides opportunities to increase its regional influence, the path ahead remains fraught with complex domestic and international implications.

The Turkish government has officially denied direct involvement in the operations that led to the collapse of the Assad regime, yet the extent of its influence over the rebel groups suggests a more nuanced reality.<sup>51</sup> The coordination and scale of the offensive, particularly the speed with which Damascus fell, indicate that such a move could not have materialized without Turkey’s tacit approval

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<sup>47</sup> On December 9, 2023, following the U.S. veto of a UN resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, President Erdoğan renewed his call for reform of the United Nations Security Council, arguing that it “has turned into a protector of Israel.” In the same address, Erdoğan further criticized the West for “ignoring cultural racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia” and claimed that the terms “terrorist” and “terrorism” have been weaponized as a pretext for attacking Islam, vilifying Muslims, and justifying the massacre of innocents. Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications. (2023, November 12). *The Joint Arab Islamic Summit Resolutions*. <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/the-joint-arab-islamic-extraordinary-summitresolutions>; Silverman, R. (2024, January 12). Can Turkey Both Stand Up to Israel and Do Business with It? *Turkey Analyst*. <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkeyanalyst-articles/item/717-can-turkey-both-stand-up-to-israel-and-do-business-with-it?.html>.

<sup>48</sup> He added that Turkey believes that the Bretton Woods institutions need to be reformed if they are to function effectively. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı. (2023, August 7). *Speech delivered by the Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan at the 14th annual meeting of the Turkish ambassadors*. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleribakani-sayin-hakan-fidan-in-14-buyukelciler-konferansiadicilisinda-yaptigi-konusma--7-agustos-2023.tr.mfa>.

<sup>49</sup> The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications. (n.d.). *President Erdoğan’s address at UN urging action in Gaza receives worldwide media coverage*. <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/haberler/detay/President-erdogans-at-un-receives-worldwide-media-coverage>.

<sup>50</sup> This section is mainly drawn from an article published by the author and other parallel projects. See Gasco, R., & Abrami, S. C. A. (2024). Turkey and the Syrian Conundrum after Assad: A Test for Ankara’s Capacity and Credibility. *IAI Commentaries*.

<sup>51</sup> Conversation with a former Turkish diplomat in the region.

and logistical facilitation. While Ankara may not have dictated the operation's timing, its long-standing support for Syrian opposition factions, particularly the SNA, positioned it as a key external actor in Syria's transition. This leverage, however, also comes with the responsibility of shaping a post-Assad Syria that aligns with Turkey's regional aspirations while avoiding the pitfalls of prolonged instability.

One immediate consequence of Assad's downfall has been the movement of Syrian refugees. The potential repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Syrians represents both a strategic and political gain for Ankara. Since 2011, Turkey has hosted over 3.5 million Syrian refugees, a reality that has sparked widespread public discontent and electoral ramifications for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ruling party. With Turkey's economy under significant strain, the refugee issue became central to the political discourse in the 2023 presidential and 2024 municipal elections. The formation of a new government in Damascus, despite its Islamist composition, provides Ankara with a pretext to push for voluntary returns, a move designed to alleviate domestic social tensions while reasserting its influence in northern Syria. However, the conditions for return remain precarious, with ongoing security concerns and fragile governance structures in place, raising questions about the feasibility of large-scale repatriations in the near future.

Another dimension shaping Turkey's calculus is the long-standing Kurdish question.<sup>52</sup> The demise of the Assad regime has altered the dynamics between Turkey and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a US-backed, Kurdish-led coalition that has maintained de facto autonomy in northeastern Syria. The absence of Russian protection in key Kurdish strongholds such as Manbij, Raqqa, and Kobani has provided Ankara with an opportunity to either escalate military operations against the SDF or leverage diplomatic channels to push for its dissolution. The strategic interest remains clear: Turkey has consistently opposed any form of Kurdish autonomy along its southern border, equating the SDF with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a group it considers a terrorist organization. With Assad's departure and shifting US priorities under the Trump administration, Ankara may now feel emboldened to press its case more forcefully.

At the same time, Turkey's domestic political landscape is undergoing notable shifts concerning the Kurdish issue. In a surprising move, Erdoğan and his ultranationalist ally Devlet Bahçeli have signaled a potential overture towards Kurdish political engagement, including the unprecedented proposal to invite Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned PKK leader, to parliament to announce the dissolution of the organization. While this initiative remains speculative, it highlights

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<sup>52</sup> This was drawn from conversations held by the author in preparation of some articles. See for instance, Abrami, S. C. A., & Gasco, R. (2024, December 23). *Does the Fall of Assad Re-Open Turkey's Kurdish Pandora's Box?* War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2024/12/does-the-fall-of-assad-re-open-turkeys-kurdish-pandoras-box/>.

the fluidity of Turkish domestic politics and the strategic calculations aimed at consolidating Erdoğan's position ahead of a potential re-election bid in 2028. The Kurdish question, therefore, remains deeply entangled with Turkey's broader regional strategy, where developments in Syria could have direct repercussions on Ankara's internal stability.

The regional dimension of Turkey's Syria policy cannot be overlooked. The timing of Assad's fall coincided with broader Middle Eastern shifts, including the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, Russia's constrained military presence, and Iran's recalibration of its regional priorities. Turkey, having maintained a delicate balance in its relations with Moscow and Tehran through the Astana Process, now finds itself in a position of relative strength. The inability of Russia and Iran to prevent Assad's ouster underscores the limits of their influence, offering Ankara greater maneuverability in shaping the new order in Syria. However, this newfound leverage also comes with heightened expectations from international stakeholders, particularly the United States and the European Union, both of which remain wary of HTS's growing role in Syria's transitional governance. Despite HTS's Islamist credentials, Turkey has sought to portray its leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, as a pragmatic figure capable of steering Syria towards stability. Turkish officials have emphasized that while HTS's past affiliations with al-Qaeda raise concerns, the group has evolved into a more locally focused actor, willing to engage in governance rather than jihadist expansionism. This narrative aligns with Ankara's broader strategy of ensuring that Syria's new leadership remains reliant on Turkish political and economic support. However, Western recognition of HTS remains a significant hurdle, and Turkey's ability to secure international legitimacy for Syria's new rulers will be a key test of its diplomatic acumen.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Turkey's assertive role in Syria risks exacerbating tensions with Israel, a key regional player with its own strategic concerns about the Islamist-leaning government in Damascus.

Beyond security considerations, Turkey's economic interests in Syria have taken center stage. The post-Assad landscape presents lucrative reconstruction opportunities for Turkish businesses, particularly in infrastructure, energy, and consumer goods. Ankara has already begun positioning itself as a primary economic partner for the new Syrian government, with Turkish construction firms eyeing major contracts for rebuilding war-torn cities. The easing of US and EU sanctions on Syria, contingent on the transitional government's willingness to moderate its policies, could further bolster Turkish economic engagement. Erdoğan has instructed his ministers of energy and transport to facilitate early recovery efforts, reinforcing Turkey's role as Syria's indispensable economic partner. The stakes are high, as a successful reconstruction effort would not only expand Turkey's regional

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<sup>53</sup> Retrieved from a closed roundtable in Istanbul, January 2025.

influence but also create economic incentives that could temper the radical elements within Syria's new leadership.

However, the challenges ahead remain formidable for other reasons. The Kurdish question continues to loom large, particularly if the SDF resists integration into a centralized Syrian military structure. While Ankara and Damascus appear aligned in their opposition to Kurdish autonomy, the extent to which they can enforce this stance without triggering renewed conflict remains uncertain. Moreover, this remains heavily linked to the internal developments of the latest "peace process" attempt. Thus, the broader geopolitical backdrop remains fluid, and Ankara's ability to cope with these complexities will determine the long-term sustainability of its influence in Syria and regionally.

#### **7.4.4. Alternative Alliances: Strategic Autonomy or New Forms of Dependence?**

In this light, one can interpret Turkey's exploration of "alternative blocs" to Western-led institutions, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), as a way to diversify its strategic partnerships and reduce its dependence on Western alliances. To simplify, these organizations offer platforms for countries dissatisfied with the current global system to voice their concerns, pursue new flexible alliances, and advocate for a multipolar world order. Some consider these organizations a mimic body of the EU and Western institutions without a strong institutional structure and cooperation atmosphere that leads to frequent clashes between its members.<sup>54</sup> However, for many countries in the Global South, the appeal of these blocs lies in their flexibility and willingness to accommodate multiple alignments. Unlike Western alliances, which often demand strict adherence to certain norms and policies, the SCO and BRICS allow member states to maintain relations with both Western and non-Western actors, reflecting the complex and fluid nature of contemporary global politics. As Schirm argues, this behavior can only be understood by "analyzing the plurality of ideational attitudes and material interests in the domestic politics of countries that shape their governments' foreign (economic) policy positions."<sup>55</sup> In this vein, by getting closer to these groups,<sup>56</sup> Turkey hopes to position itself as a bridge between East and West, leveraging its unique geopolitical position to maximize its strategic autonomy and influence.

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<sup>54</sup> Adisonmez & Oztig, 2024, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Schirm, 2023, 56.

<sup>56</sup> Turkey became a dialogue partner of the SCO in 2012. A year later, Erdoğan portrayed membership in the Organization as an alternative to Turkey's EU journey. Turkey was invited to the Organization's annual meeting as a 'special guest' for the first time. In this meeting, Erdoğan not only stressed the common historical ties and cultural values shared by Turkey and the members of the Organisation but also expressed Turkey's desire to become its full member. Similarly, in September 2023, Turkey asked for BRICS membership. See Erşen & Köstem, 2019; Jacinto, L. (2018, July 27). Turkey's 'balancing act' with BRICS bid raises NATO concerns. *France24*. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240905-nato-member-turkey-balancing-act-brics-bid-russia-china>.



Proponents within the Turkish government argue that these organizations offer new economic opportunities and a way to counterbalance the perceived biases of Western institutions.<sup>57</sup> Dissatisfied with the stalled EU accession process and seeking to diversify its foreign relations, Turkey sees participation in these blocs as a means to enhance its strategic autonomy and increase its leverage in its dealings with the West. In the words of FM Hakan Fidan,

If our economic integration with the European Union had been crowned with membership, perhaps we would not be in such a quest on many issues. While membership relations cannot move forward due to lack of will, on the other hand, there are things we need to do with the candidate country status. But in recent years, some subjective approaches, the efforts of some EU countries to make their own issues the subject of the EU, have brought the EU's agenda on Turkey down a bit.<sup>58</sup>

As Giannotta highlights “if the EU's declared intentions are not supported by facts and a clear road map is not set, not only will the European credibility be dramatically undermined, but, in line with its diplomatic differentiation, Turkey will feel more than entitled to find an alternative path.”<sup>59</sup> Like many others, she also highlights how Turkey's participation in the EU Foreign Ministers' informal meeting held in Brussels on August 29, 2024, had a significant meaning, at least from a symbolic perspective after five years of absence, as it is intended to revitalize Ankara's relations with the members. However, thorny issues in the relations with the EU remain pending – the visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, the modernization of the customs union, the restarting of negotiations, and the Cyprus issue – and the new EU leadership and the upcoming US elections in late 2024 represent both opportunities and uncertainties. In geoeconomic terms, according to official figures, Turkey-BRICS trade volume increased from \$74.3 billion in 2013 to \$121.3 billion in 2023, which sees the Russia-China axis heading the group.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, Turkey's participation in these groups has also highlighted similar critical elements already underlined in the last chapter of this thesis. Some observers argue that the economic gains from joining the SCO or BRICS may be limited, given Turkey's imbalanced trade relations with China and Russia compared to its more robust economic ties with the EU.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, critics suggest that Turkey's engagement with these organizations could be seen as a strategy to divert

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<sup>57</sup> Giannotta, V. (2024, September 10). Türkiye's growing interest in BRICS: Analysis of motivations and implications. *Anadolu Ajansı*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/opinion/opinion-turkiye-s-growing-interest-in-brics-analysis-of-motivations-and-implications/3326215>.

<sup>58</sup> Hürriyet. (2024, September 19). <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/fm-links-brics-ties-to-eu-bid-stalemate-200738>. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/fm-links-brics-ties-to-eu-bid-stalemate-200738>.

<sup>59</sup> Giannotta, 2024.

<sup>60</sup> In 2023, Turkey's trade with Russia and China reached \$105 billion, 17% of total external trade. Turkey also aims to attract more investment from China, including closer cooperation in energy, telecommunications, infrastructure, and green technologies. Recently, Chinese electric vehicle producer BYD agreed to build a \$1 billion manufacturing plant in Turkey. Also, Turkey's Ministry of Trade adopted the “far countries strategy” in 2022, which aims to quadruple trade relations with economies whose average distance to Turkey is 8,500 km. This strategy also covers large economies in the Global South, such as China, Brazil, and India. See Kutlay, 2024.

<sup>61</sup> In 2023, Turkey's total trade with BRICS was almost 60% of its total trade with its main commercial partner, the EU. In economic terms, for Turkey, BRICS means Russia and China. These two countries comprise 87% of Turkey-BRICS trade, but Turkey's economic ties with Russia and China are highly asymmetric: Turkey's exports are just 15.7% of its imports. Idem.

attention from domestic economic problems or as a sign of extreme need for financial relief. Soli Özel notes that “these steps lead to an increase in power or reputation only in appearance; they reinforce the image of a government that does not know what it is doing, constantly bluffing as its hand weakens.”<sup>62</sup> In the view of the Turkish government, these moves reflect a broader strategy of maintaining a “multi-vector foreign policy,” where Turkey seeks to maximize its influence by engaging with a range of international actors. Policymakers in Ankara seem to see this approach as one that can allow Turkey to hedge its bets and avoid becoming overly reliant on any single bloc or alliance. As Erdogan stated, “We do not consider BRICS an alternative to any other structure. We regard these structures and alliance grounds as formations with distinct functions.”<sup>63</sup> Still, Turkey's participation in these groups could strain its relations with its traditional Western allies, especially within NATO. As Aydinbas observes, “Erdogan defines a strategic success as one in which he can have a foot in different camps, playing off the West against Russia and China... but at times, this balancing act has gone too far, testing the waters and going a bit overboard.”<sup>64</sup> Finally, this could also create the risk that “Russia might play with this issue to score some points in the West [...], use it as a negotiating tactic to move Turkey on some issues, and deepen the rift between Turkey and the West, particularly NATO.”<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, Turkey's distance from the West does not mean it enjoys closer ties with other poles. For instance, “although Sino-Turkish relations have become friendlier since the 2010s, China has not emerged as a direct substitute for Turkey's souring relations with the West.”<sup>66</sup> Turkey's NATO membership still limits its ability to develop strong ties with other “rival” institutional mechanisms. This is especially true since NATO revealed its most recent strategic concept at the Madrid Summit in 2022, which painted China as a rival to the Alliance.

In this regard, Turkey's participation in BRICS and the SCO is part of a broader effort to leverage its position in a post-Western or non-polar global order, as in the case of the mediation in the Ukrainian and Gaza conflicts. However, the effectiveness of this strategy remains uncertain, given the contradictions and challenges inherent in balancing these diverse alliances. As regional and international tensions continue to evolve, TFP is likely to face ongoing tests of its flexibility and adaptability in a rapidly changing world order. Certainly, the shift from a complete break in relations

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<sup>62</sup> Özel, S. (2024, September 10). Yönünü şaşırmış bir dış politikanın yeni hamlesi: BRICS başvurusu. *Aposto*. <https://aposto.com/s/yonunu-sasirmis-bir-dis-politikanin-yeni-hamlesi-brics-basvurusu>.

<sup>63</sup> Anadolu Ajansı. (2024, September 8). *Türkiye's membership in BRICS may be welcomed news for bloc: Russian media*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkiye-s-membership-in-brics-may-be-welcomed-news-for-bloc-russian-media/3324454>.

<sup>64</sup> Aydinbaş, A. (2024, September 27). Building BRICS: What Erdogan's geopolitical gamble could mean for the West. *ECFR*.

<sup>65</sup> Soyulu, R. (2024, September 12). Russian leaks on Turkey's Brics membership bid unsettle Ankara. *Middle East Eye*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/russian-leaks-turkeys-brics-membership-application-unsettle-ankara>.

<sup>66</sup> Üngör, Ç. (2024). A Bridge No More? Türkiye's Geopolitical Significance in the Twenty-first Century. *Survival*, 66(4), 85–90. See also Öniş & Yalikul, 2021.

and regional confrontation on various fronts to several multi-billion dollar agreements on financial and commercial partnerships is often identified as an example of Erdoğan's pragmatism. Similarly, at the individual level, the appointment of the ex-chief of intelligence, Hakan Fidan, as Foreign Ministry and a possible "reorientation" of Turkish foreign policy towards a pro-Western position was quickly interpreted as a sign of a new era.<sup>67</sup> However, some argue that

the increasing U-turns and pragmatism in Turkish foreign policy are, in fact, not caused by a masterplan for a reorientation of Turkey towards the West or East but need to be understood as a by-product of the continuing decline of Turkey as a 'sub-imperialist' power due to the transformation of the Turkish economy.<sup>68</sup>

While both these evaluations appear excessively reliant on strict categories, the latest developments in TFP seem to confirm this thesis's findings in a way that helps respond to the sub-research questions posed at the incipit of this work. First, although Turkey has adopted a more independent and assertive foreign policy with a higher level of securitization, its foreign policy has not reoriented or separated from the Western bloc.<sup>69</sup> Rather, it appears caught in between, a situation where it cannot detach from its traditional alliances for security and economic reasons. Still, it also struggles to strengthen solid alternative partnerships with non-Western powers. Second, the attitude of trying to "sit at every table" and play an active role comes with the risk of losing international and domestic credibility as well as overstretching the distance between leadership objectives and the country's actual material capabilities. Third, the relaunch of Turkey's ambition to play a central role in multiple scenarios comes with the difficulties of elaborating a coherent strategy. This underlies two risks. One is the risk of undermining the "benign" rhetoric and mediating role sought by the Turkish leadership in times when the country's domestic political outlook appears extremely uncertain under a "competitive authoritarian" regime. Another one is the risk of making U-turns become the norm – and not the exception – if FPEs' perceptions of threats and opportunities continue to lie at the brink of ideational and national interest purposes. Overall, the danger could be that a vision planned to pursue strategic autonomy results in creating multiple external and internal vulnerabilities in an era of unpredictable flux. This would define TFP "more by a reactive and unpredictable stance subjected to political dividends rather than a proactive long-term one that fulfills long-term achievable goals."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Aras, B. (2023). Are Türkiye's Relations with the West About to Improve? *ISPI*.

<sup>68</sup> Erol, 2024, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Haugom, 2019; Hoffmann, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with a former diplomat.

#### 7.4.5. Foreign Policy Making

The recent changes in Turkey's foreign policy leadership, particularly the appointments of Hakan Fidan as the new MFA and İbrahim Kalın as the head of the MİT, demonstrate a strategic “symbiosis” between intelligence and diplomacy, with each playing a complementary role in advancing the country's foreign policy objectives. This reconfiguration underlines a deliberate effort by President Erdoğan to integrate the functions of intelligence gathering and diplomatic engagement into a unified approach. Hakan Fidan, who served as the head of MİT for 13 years, is widely acknowledged for his critical role in shaping Turkey's foreign policy, particularly towards the Middle East. According to the government circles<sup>71</sup> – but also external observers – under his leadership, MİT underwent a transformation, focusing more on foreign intelligence and expanding its capabilities to address emerging threats, including terrorism and regional instability. Fidan's reforms included enhancing human intelligence networks, increasing the MİT's technological capacity, and redefining the objectives of the organization to align more closely with Turkey's foreign policy goals. These changes allowed the MİT to act with an integrated and holistic strategy, providing substantial support to Turkey's diplomatic efforts abroad. The fact that Fidan has “affixed his name to the papers, endorsing the very processes he set in motion” suggests an intention of the government to continue to bridge the gap between intelligence and diplomacy that he helped create. Firstly, the foreign ministry's importance in the policy-making process is set to increase. In recent years, policy was formed in an ecosystem made up of the Presidency, the foreign ministry, the intelligence agency, and the military. The role of the ministry itself was previously arguably relatively less pronounced. However, under Fidan, a powerful name trusted by President Erdoğan, the ministry's role is set to increase. Additionally, “relatively enhanced diplomatic professionalism and institutionalism are likely to define the language and style of Turkish foreign policy.”<sup>72</sup> Second, Fidan's international reputation further underscores his strategic significance. As Guney Yildiz observed,

During my tenure as a BBC News journalist, former Specialist Adviser to the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, and think-tank analyst, I had the privilege of interacting with an array of influential figures [...] from across the globe. Many of these individuals had worked or engaged directly with Fidan. The conversations inevitably veered towards Turkish foreign policy and the country's actions beyond its borders. In these conversations, the importance of MİT, the unseen hand guiding Turkey's

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<sup>71</sup> Yeşiltaş, M. (2024, January 12). The revolution in Turkish intelligence. *Daily Sabah*. <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/the-revolution-in-turkish-intelligence>.

<sup>72</sup> Özel, S. (2023, June 26). Turkish Foreign Policy Under New Management. *Institute MONTAIGNE*. <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/turkish-foreign-policy-under-new-management>; See also Fidan, H. (2023). Turkish Foreign Policy at the Turn of the “Century of Türkiye”: Challenges, Vision, Objectives, and Transformation. *Insight Turkey*, 25(Summer 2023), 11–25.

global actions, was always underscored. All the individuals I spoke with recognized Fidan's intellect and strategic prowess, with some even referring to him as Dr. Fidan.<sup>73</sup>

Simultaneously, the appointment of İbrahim Kalın, formerly the Presidential Spokesperson, as the head of MİT, also highlights the growing interdependence between intelligence and diplomacy. Kalın, who played a crucial role in shaping Turkish foreign policy as a close advisor to Erdoğan, is also known “for his diplomatic acumen and has a favorable reputation abroad.” His new role at MİT suggests continuing a foreign policy strategy where intelligence plays a vital role in supporting diplomatic initiatives. Kalın has emphasized the importance of a comprehensive intelligence approach in managing the diverse and complex challenges Turkey faces, such as terrorism, espionage, and regional conflicts. MİT’s enhanced capabilities under Fidan, such as increased drone operations and expanded intelligence networks, have provided a strategic advantage in Turkey's counterterrorism efforts, which supports the country’s broader foreign policy objectives. Meanwhile, the MFA, under Fidan's leadership, is expected to assume a more active and pronounced role in shaping foreign policy, guided by a more strategic and coordinated approach. According to the government, this integrated strategy is a response to the evolving security environment around Turkey, where intelligence operations and diplomatic engagements are increasingly interconnected. As the SETA think tank notes, the new security concept necessitates “multi-vector and multidimensional ways of thinking and methods of action,” where intelligence and diplomacy work in tandem to address a range of threats, from terrorism to geopolitical conflicts.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, this approach aligns with Erdoğan's broader vision of consolidating power and leveraging all state institutions to project Turkey's influence more effectively on the global stage.

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<sup>73</sup> See Yildiz, G. (2023, June 4). Hakan Fidan: Turkey’s Spymaster Became Its Top Diplomat. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/guneyyildiz/2023/06/04/hakan-fidan-a-boost-for-turkish-foreign-policy/>. This was also confirmed in interviews with Turkish diplomats and high-ranked figures not necessarily in line with the AKP. It is worth noting that prior to that job, Fidan also worked as head of TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), an organization that played an important role in projecting Turkish soft power abroad. The fact that new Minister is Fidan, who spent 13 years as the head of the Turkish intelligence service and had a significant influence in the shaping and implementation of foreign policy, especially towards Syria, and was the main architect of Turkey’s efforts to normalize relations with the Middle Eastern countries Ankara alienated over the course of the past ten years, certainly drew a lot of attention.

<sup>74</sup> Çelik, M. (2024, January 11). Ankara’s approach to intelligence in ‘Century of Türkiye.’ *Daily Sabah*. <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/ankaras-approach-to-intelligence-in-century-of-turkiye>.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis traced Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) through four distinctive periods, each shaped by complex interactions between external structural conditions, internal institutional and sociopolitical dynamics, and the role of individual dimensions. These interrelated levels and components in the thesis are external, internal, and individual, each contributing to analyzing the formulation of TFP in a non-hierarchical way but through a two-way interaction logic. As demonstrated throughout the analysis, TFP is not a linear process that can be explained by single variables such as ideology, material capabilities, or leadership preferences. Rather, it is a product of multiple parameters that shift in relevance across periods and within the same periods. By using a theoretical framework drawn from third-way approaches like Neoclassical Realism, Foreign Policy Analysis, and Historical Institutionalism, this study has sought to assess how the broader global and regional environment, Turkey's domestic milieu, and individual agents' roles contributed to both continuity and change in TFP throughout a wider timeframe compared to similar types of works. Therefore, this conclusive section delves deeper into these interactions, synthesizing insights from the four periods analyzed, reflecting on the main research questions posed in the thesis, and providing final consideration about the contributions and limitations of this study.

### 8.1. Continuity and/or Change?

Since the early 1980s, Turgut Özal's tenure marked the beginning of a more outward-looking and proactive TFP, largely driven by his economic liberalization agenda. Following the 1980 military coup, Turkey found itself in a political context heavily influenced by security concerns and military dominance. Özal, in his role as Prime Minister, viewed foreign policy as an extension of Turkey's economic potential, seeking to integrate the country into global markets. Özal's vision of modernizing Turkey's economy and reducing the military's influence over politics was reflected in his foreign policy initiatives, which focused on diversifying Turkey's economic partnerships, expanding trade, and engaging both the European Community and other neighboring areas like the Middle East and Central Asia. Özal's foreign policy approach revolved around a clear shift from the Kemalist, security-focused paradigm towards economic pragmatism and soft power diplomacy. In this period, relations with the European Community were particularly significant, as Özal saw the process of integration as a way to modernize Turkey's economy and shift power away from the military elite. He emphasized trade relations with both Europe and the Middle East, but his Middle Eastern initiatives were met with skepticism by the military, which remained committed to Turkey's

traditional pro-Western alignment. Thus, Özal's policies reflected a fundamental tension between civilian leadership and the military, a tension that would persist throughout the 1990s and beyond. Özal's second term as President (1989–1993) saw a greater emphasis on Turkey's strategic role in the post-Cold War order. For instance, he attempted to develop a more assertive foreign policy during the 1990 Gulf War, where Turkey aligned with the US-led coalition. Such a vision of Turkey as a key regional player capable of contributing to global security marked a departure from the country's traditionally non-interventionist stance in the Middle East. However, his efforts to expand Turkey's influence in Central Asia and the Middle East were limited by both internal opposition and external constraints, such as Russia's continued influence in Central Asia and internal disputes about the centralization and de-bureaucratization of TFP pursued by Özal and his ANAP party.

Contrarily, the 1990s were characterized by political instability and coalition governments, which led to a more reactive and defensive approach in TFP. The coalition governments – dominated by leaders such as Süleyman Demirel, Tansu Çiller, and Necmettin Erbakan – struggled to develop a coherent foreign policy amidst domestic challenges and growing security threats, particularly the Kurdish insurgency. The military, having reasserted its influence in the aftermath of the 1980 coup, prioritized internal security concerns, and this often constrained the civilian leadership's foreign policy options. Security concerns regarding the Kurdish issue and border instability dominated TFP throughout the 1990s. The Gulf War and its spillover effects – particularly the power vacuum in northern Iraq – further complicated Turkey's foreign policy as it sought to contain the threat of Kurdish separatism. The military's heavy involvement in decision-making during this period meant that foreign policy remained largely reactive, focused on managing immediate threats rather than long-term strategy, able to reassess Turkey's role in a changing international order. A key moment in the 1990s was the rise of Necmettin Erbakan and the Refah Party, which introduced a more Islamist-oriented foreign policy that sought to strengthen Turkey's ties with Muslim-majority countries. However, Erbakan's alleged drift away from Western alliances was short-lived, as the military staged the so-called “post-modern coup” in 1997, reinforcing its dominance over foreign policy and reasserting Turkey's traditional Western alignment. The events of the 1990s demonstrated the continued influence of the military and the limitations of civilian leaders in shaping TFP in a fragmented political environment but also paved the way for a period of political instability.

In this context, the rise of the AKP in 2002 marked a turning point in Turkish politics. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, the AKP sought to position Turkey as a central power in regional and global affairs. This period was characterized by a more proactive foreign policy, driven by Davutoğlu's “zero problems with neighbors” and “strategic depth” doctrines. The AKP's foreign policy during this time aimed to

balance relations with Western allies while deepening ties with Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. One of the central features of the AKP's early foreign policy was its emphasis on soft power diplomacy, using institutions like TIKA and the Diyanet to project Turkish influence and "model" abroad. Turkey also leveraged its growing economy to expand its influence in regions like Africa and the Balkans. The AKP's early success in foreign policy was closely tied to the Europeanization process, which allowed the party to reduce military influence over foreign policy and strengthen civilian institutions as well as to project the image of a rising "benign" power able to mediate between the US and the West's interests and regional dynamics. While the AKP's proactive foreign policy in the early 2000s marked a significant departure from the reactive and defensive posture of the 1990s, it was also shaped by domestic political changes. The rise of the Anatolian Tigers, a conservative bourgeoisie class that benefitted from Turkey's economic growth since the Özal era, played a key role in shaping the AKP's foreign policy agenda.

Nonetheless, the Arab Uprising and the Syrian civil war marked a critical juncture for TFP as the regional environment became increasingly unstable. Contrary to the AKP's expectations, Turkey found itself entangled in regional conflicts, particularly in Syria. The post-2011 period saw a shift towards a more militarized and interventionist foreign policy, with Turkey engaging in direct military interventions in Syria, Libya, and Iraq. This period also paved the way for a growing emphasis on Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy. Together with drastic domestic alterations, like the 2016-failed coup and the coalition with the ultranationalist MHP, the AKP sought to diversify Turkey's alliances by deepening relations with Russia and China, while simultaneously distancing itself from Western partners. However, these new alliances have remained largely transactional and did not evolve into long-term strategic partnerships. Moreover, the latest development of TFP are characterized by increasing centralization, with decision-making becoming more personalized around Erdoğan. Domestically, the introduction of the Presidential system further consolidated Erdoğan's control over foreign policy. The centralization of power reduced the plurality of voices in Turkey's foreign policy decision-making, with institutions like the MFA and the military playing a diminished role. Instead, Erdoğan's vision of Turkey as a regional hegemon became the driving force behind foreign policy decisions, with actions increasingly aimed at bolstering domestic legitimacy.

With these considerations in mind, what follows is an attempt to answer to the guiding research questions of this thesis.

- 1. Is Turkey a proactive or reactive player? Is its current international role the result of a longer historical learning process?*



Turkey's foreign policy has oscillated between proactive and reactive strategies, shaped by both external pressures and internal dynamics. Under Özal, Turkey adopted a more proactive stance, emphasizing economic diplomacy and regional engagement. However, the 1990s coalition era saw a return to reactivity, driven by domestic instability and security concerns. The AKP's early years marked a return to proactivity, with Turkey positioning itself as a regional mediator. However, the post-2011 period saw a reversion to reactivity in the face of regional instability, particularly in Syria. Turkey's current international role can thus be seen as part of a longer historical learning process, shaped by its ability to adapt to changing circumstances while balancing proactive diplomacy with reactive security concerns. However, the latest evolutions leave the question marks opened in terms of the balance between perceptions, expectations and real means and long-term goals, especially in a context where fast-paced uncertain evolutions in the external environments parallel with a more blurred border between foreign policy and domestic consensus imperatives.

*2. Is TFP elaborated more according to its material capabilities or the ideological preferences of its leadership? How do socio-political and institutional transformations influence Turkey's decision-making and foreign policy-making?*

Both material capabilities and ideological preferences have shaped TFP, with their relative importance varying across periods. Özal's foreign policy was driven by material concerns, particularly the need to integrate Turkey into global markets, but at the same time, contoured with discourses about the Turkish Model and ideas like neo-Ottomanism to legitimate Turkey's expanded interest towards wider geographical areas of interest. Seemingly, under the AKP, ideology and material consideration seem to alternate with each other. While the first decade seemed to be focused on an economic-driven foreign policy and a Europeanization process, signs of ideological elements were already emerging in the discourse of the AKP's leaders. However, in that period, the party had to balance between its long-term goals and the need to cope with an unfavorable institutional setting to fully implement its agenda. Moreover, ideological factors – such as neo-Ottomanism and political Islam – became prominent, influencing Turkey's regional engagement. Socio-political transformations, such as the rise of a conservative bourgeoisie and the reduction of military influence, also played a key role in shaping TFP. These transformations allowed for a more pluralistic decision-making process in the early AKP years but were gradually overshadowed by Erdoğan's increasingly centralized leadership. After 2016, such ideological elements have been maintained but seem to be present(ed) under new vests. Indeed, the loss of credibility in many international and regional stages and the pursuit of a "precious loneliness" – then strategic autonomy – pushed the Turkish leadership to elaborate a discourse forged around both nativist and nationalistic rhetoric. On the one hand, this

emerged because of the strategic survival of the AKP, which needs to compromise with the MHP's Eurasianist and hard power visions. On the other hand, Islamist-oriented elements like neo-Ottomanism added to its soft power function elements related to national grandeur as military operations, technological advancements, and bold foreign policy initiatives appear to serve regime boosting effects purposes.

3. *Who are the main actors involved in this process? What elements influence their perceptions and reactions?*

4. *Is Turkey's decision-making and policy-making process a "one-man show" or still constrained by a plurality of actors, different constraints, and evolving types of interests?*

The main actors shaping TFP have shifted over time. In the 1980s and 1990s, the military remained a dominant dominant player, with civilian leaders often constrained by its influence. However, leaders like Özal sought to alter the mechanism of policy making by avoiding traditional channels and by giving prominence to the rise of a new conservative elite. In a different way, Erbakan tried to promote changes in TFP orientation, but the military was still powerful enough to prevent such moves. However, the AKP's rise saw the empowerment of new socio-political actors, such as conservative business elites and Islamic networks, who played a key role in shaping foreign policy. Moreover, Davutoglu became one of the rare examples of an academician who could put his ideas into practice to that extent. In addition, the Gülen movement played a significant role in supporting the AKP's proactive stance in its "golden era." However, by the post-2016 period, Erdoğan's leadership became the central force behind TFP, with decision-making increasingly personalized. This shift was accompanied by a decline in the influence of traditional institutions, such as the MFA and the military, and a greater emphasis on pragmatic, often transactional, alliances with non-Western actors

5. *What changed, and how? What remained constant, and what had cycles?*

One of the key constants in TFP has been the military's involvement, particularly in security concerns like the Kurdish issue and Cyprus. However, over time, civilian actors – especially under the AKP – gained more control over foreign policy, though this shift was not linear. Issues like Cyprus remained highly securitized, while others like the Kurdish issue saw periods of attempted de-securitization, particularly during the AKP's early years, only to revert to securitization in response to changing domestic and regional dynamics. The role of neo-Ottomanism as an ideological driver of foreign policy also evolved, becoming more pronounced under the AKP as part of Erdoğan's strategic autonomy vision. Finally, while Turkey's balancing act between different partners has always been a characteristic of TFP, the level of such practice reached by the AKP put Turkey's Western alignment

under question and rendered its relations with the US more transactional. In parallel, the increasing development of fluid alliances with alternative “powers” like Russia and China has not evolved into any strategic partnership. This shows how alliances like NATO and interdependent partnerships with traditional European countries are still of high strategic and symbolic value for Turkey.

## **8.2. Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions for the study of TFP**

In an article published in 2024, even realist scholars from the Bilkent school of IR in Ankara recognized that “the search for alternative theories should be a sort of archeological excavation where previously unseen and covered facts and perspectives are revealed with the help of other disciplines.”<sup>1</sup> More in general, in line with the changes in global politics, the field of IR has also experienced important theoretical and methodological shifts. During this period, scholars have been exploring ways to move beyond Western dominance in the discipline, such as Post-Western IR, Non-Western IR, and Global IR.<sup>2</sup> However, limited focus has been dedicated to the detailed connections between global and local developments. As such, Turkey serves as an interesting case to explore the relationship between local and regional developments in IR.

In this sense, this thesis seeks to make several key contributions to the study of TFP in particular and to “third way” approaches in general. Employing a framework that integrates different disciplines and theoretical approaches has provided a nuanced understanding of how external, internal, and individual parameters shape an evolving phenomenon like Turkish Foreign Policy. It also expands on the role of leadership in foreign policy-making, demonstrating how Turkey’s international role is not merely a product of systemic constraints but also individual leadership styles and domestic political dynamics. This was not done by searching for unidimensional or causality but by an “inside-out perspective” contextualizing internal dynamics into wider external ones and vice versa. As such, one of the core contributions of this thesis lies in its empirical scope. Unlike other works that often focus on shorter time spans, this research sought to trace lines of change (and/or continuity) by analyzing a wider spectrum of elements on three different levels, thus reducing the risk of overlooking crucial components to understand the mechanisms behind and the final outputs of TFP making. At the same time, this thesis linked its historical analysis to more recent developments, therefore providing an updated study that extends into early 2025. In this sense, it made an effort to

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<sup>1</sup> Özdemir, 2024, 118.

<sup>2</sup> Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 647;

avoid “epistemic superimposition.”, namely, the act of approaching real-world politics on the presupposition that theoretical assumptions about it apply without interrogating whether these theories are applicable.<sup>3</sup> Concurrently, it has tried to avoid the risk of creating hierarchies within different scholarships, as well as the one of “privileging theory over empirical research even as it claims to support empirical testing of theory, thereby paradoxically relegating research conducted about or outside the ‘Western core’ to the realm of non-well defined area studies.”<sup>4</sup> Still, this does not imply reinforcing the “Western vs. non-Western” debate. Instead, one good side effect could be that this thesis’s approach represents “a first step to discovering the problems in the periphery, and in order to reach more generalizable conclusions, similar research has to be done in different countries.”<sup>5</sup> Overall, these elements favor the possibility of understanding the roots of the latest trends – but also future perspectives – in TFP.

Moreover, the thesis contributes to the Italian academic context by positioning Turkey as a critical subject of inquiry in its own right rather than as a peripheral topic subsumed under broader studies of the Middle East or under strict disciplinary requirements. This seems to be in line with the latest debates within Turkish academia itself, which calls for recognizing that “Turkey stands out as one of the best places to observe and analyze the interactions between Western and non-Western perspectives.” This is because one can also find there both emotional and rational bases for all the problems emerging from interactions between different theoretical perspectives. For these reasons, Turkey appears to be one of the best candidates to start investigating the interactions between the core, the periphery (or western and non-western), and the outer periphery, and the consequences of such interactions for the discipline.<sup>6</sup> In general, this assumes relevance if we recognize that “because the subject matter of ‘international’ requires multi-disciplinary and multi-paradigmatic approaches, and one can argue that multiplicities and plurality are necessary for the discipline to develop.”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, this study also aims to contribute to the recent discussions within HIR. As mentioned, varied periods of conceptual change support the claim that “historical records do not speak for themselves and that the current ‘episteme’ of Historical IR to produce ‘better evidence’ risks subscribing to a historiography that equates the work of the historically minded IR scholar with the need to show how ‘history really happened.’”<sup>8</sup> Embracing conceptual history thus opens new

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<sup>3</sup> In other words, overlaying (inherently) simplified theories onto unique socio-historical circumstances because they are a priori assumed to hold. In Dutkiewicz, J., & Smolenski, J. (2023). Epistemic superimposition: The war in Ukraine and the poverty of expertise in international relations theory. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 26(4), 626.

<sup>4</sup> Kaczmarek, K., & Ortmann, S. (2021). IR theory and Area Studies: A plea for displaced knowledge about international politics. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 24(4), 820–847.

<sup>5</sup> Özdemir, 2024, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>7</sup> Holsti, K. J. (1989). Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Which Are the Fairest Theories of All? *International Studies Quarterly*, 33(3), 255.

<sup>8</sup> Kessler & Leira, 2024, 435.

perspectives on how the past is being remembered, but also on how the future can be imagined. To advance in this direction, this research aligns with the call to incorporate the study of conceptual change more explicitly in historical analyses.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, the study also has its limitations. Above all, the anonymity of interviewees, particularly in a politically charged context like Turkey, might be seen as restricting the explanatory power of some crucial passages. Moreover, the researcher's positionality may have introduced bias into the data collection process and in the general positioning throughout the analysis of the thesis. This is because paradigms are heavily influenced by both historical backgrounds and the positions from where international events are viewed. Nevertheless, in this case, the belief is that intense fieldwork and personal experiences "on the ground" helped – at least – partially to ease such partialities. Third, the prominence given to areas like the Middle East and the sidelining of others – such as Africa, Asia, and the Balkans – leaves room to other research to extend the analysis to these under-explored regions, potentially offering new perspectives on TFP's global aspirations. Another aspect is the use of a predominantly qualitative approach, which, while rich in detail, may miss broader trends that could be captured through quantitative methods. Future research could incorporate quantitative data, such as public opinion surveys or statistical analyses of foreign policy decisions, to "illuminate the other side of the same coin." Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches – such as integrating international political economy or discourse analysis – could offer new theoretical lenses for understanding the complexities of TFP.

Despite these limitations, the empirical, theoretical, and methodological choices made in this thesis were guided by the need to develop a process-oriented and empirical-based analysis of TFP. Abandoning grand theorizing exercises and strict disciplinary boundaries might be a risk in terms of academic credibility. However, as many have lately noted, when supported by theoretical reflections and empirical data, "eclectic" approaches allow for a deeper understanding of how and why specific (foreign policy) outputs emerge at critical junctures or within shorter periods, under the same or different leaderships, and under ideational or pragmatic vests. Stories – or narratives, for that matter – "connect the present with a meaningful past and thereby offer a way forward. This is what makes them so powerful, and this is why they do not fade away even if "falsified" by "empirical" evidence."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the hope is to offer insights into the broader dynamics of continuity and change

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<sup>9</sup> Idem.

<sup>10</sup> Kessler & Leira, 2024, 422.

(in Turkish foreign policy) and provide substantial reference points for understanding today's dynamics by looking at the past. Yet, with the faith that academia is not made for the sake of academia but to answer today's questions.

### 8.3. Final Considerations on TFP and the Way Ahead

We don't have to consent to the role that anyone has given us in this game. As Turkey, we have started to implement our own plans.<sup>11</sup>

In its most recent developments, Turkey's foreign policy has undergone a significant transformation, shaped by a desire for strategic autonomy amidst fluid and evolving domestic and international milieus. These latest trends appear to have been increasing Turkish politics' complexity, evolutionary, and unpredictable nature, leading to various conceptual frameworks to interpret the country's direction. However, much of the theoretical interpretations of such changes should remain tied to the practical underpinnings of a regime that faces both internal and external pressures.<sup>12</sup> As such, at the heart of Turkey's current quest for strategic autonomy is the idea of balancing these competing interests to ensure greater independence on the global stage. To simplify, the concept of strategic autonomy often reflects the challenges inherent in Turkey's attempts to balance between traditional Western partners and non-Western actors like Russia and China. Yet, as Öniş and Kutlay argue, "strategic autonomy does not necessarily entail decoupling from a Great Power. Rather, because of excessive costs, it may be a policy impulse aimed at attracting domestic support through the exercise of more cautious autonomy-maximizing policies."<sup>13</sup> This is where the contradiction in Turkey's foreign policy becomes apparent. While the country seeks independence from the West, its dependence on crucial actors – especially Russia – is deepening. The purchase of S-400 missile systems from Moscow and the development of the Akkuyu nuclear plant through a Russian state corporation symbolize this growing dependency, which appears to undermine Turkey's broader aims of autonomy. Moreover, whether or not Ankara will join the BRICS, the actual immediate advantages of diverting its attention towards this group raise doubts about the geoeconomic advantages.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See TCCB. (2016, October 19). "Bu Ülkede Artık Kimsenin Yaptığı İhanet Yanına Kâr Kalmayacak."

<sup>12</sup> Adar, 2022, 506.

<sup>13</sup> Öniş and Kutlay, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Kutlay, M. (2024). Why does Turkey want to join BRICS – and what will the trade-offs be? *LSE Ideas*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2024/09/20/why-does-turkey-want-to-join-brics-and-what-will-the-trade-offs-be/>.

In this regard, one could claim that the mismatch between ideas and practical foreign policy execution has become more prominent, as Ankara's international ambitions appear increasingly out of sync with its material capabilities. As such, the gap between Turkey's resources and its regional commitments has cast an "all-encompassing sense of siege, retreat, and isolation" over its foreign policy. Turkey's active engagement in conflict zones such as Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh – and lately Ukraine and Gaza – while signaling a bold foreign policy stance, comes with the risk of leading to overextension, where ambitions might surpass actual assets. Certainly, such daring behavior has brought some advantages to Turkey, overall the possibility to assert its image of being able to "sit at multiple tables at the same time" but also real gains in terms of expanded commercial, military, and political networks around the globe.

However, strategic autonomy as a concept cannot be detached from Turkey's domestic level, where the pursuit of such a vision serves as a domestic legitimization tool, particularly for the ruling bloc and Erdoğan's consolidation of power. Following the failed coup attempt in 2016, foreign policy became deeply intertwined with "rally around the flag" dynamics.<sup>15</sup> The government framed several external and internal challenges as threats to national sovereignty, reinforcing a narrative of "masterminds" against Turkey, which then bolstered the AKP-MHP authoritarian grip on power through nativist and ultranationalist discourses. Moreover, this paralleled with the personalization of foreign policy that has not only alienated traditional bureaucratic institutions and mechanisms but has also led to a nationalist, security-driven approach that seems to prioritize electoral political gains and intra-party trustees over long-term strategic coherence.

Nonetheless, the limitations of strategic autonomy leave room to reflect on how, despite Turkey's growing dependency on Russia, its ties to the West remain crucial. Ankara's relationships with NATO and the EU are often strained, yet transactional cooperation mechanisms and strong interdependence have kept these connections intact without major ruptures. Ideational and normative arguments complemented and sustained interest-based justifications for the need to avoid a definitive breach and preserve cooperation.<sup>16</sup> While the West normative and transformative capacity might have decreased compared to the early 2000s, the economic interdependence with the EU and the prestige and strategic value of Turkey's NATO membership highlights the enduring relevance of these

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<sup>15</sup> According to Aydın-Düzgüt et al., in the Turkish case, strategic autonomy extends beyond geopolitical imperatives and the pursuit of an autonomous policy space that maintains ties with rival major powers. It also encompasses a domestically oriented dimension. Since 2010, strategic autonomy has not only shaped the direction of Turkish foreign policy but has also served as a tool for reinforcing regime security. At times, a potential tension arises between structural drivers, which necessitate restraint and caution amid great power competition, and political motives that prioritize regime security. This tension can undermine the broader objective of positioning Turkey as an influential actor in its wider neighborhood, whether through multiple alignments or long-term capacity-building policies aimed at developing a robust economic infrastructure to sustain autonomy-seeking strategies. See Aydın-Düzgüt, S., Kutlay, M., & Keyman, E. F. (2025).

<sup>16</sup> Soler i Lecha, 2023.

alliances, even as Turkey explores ties with non-Western actors like Russia, China, or, lately, the BRICS. This can be linked to the fact that the complex international order in which Turkey finds itself – where the world is neither strictly unipolar nor multipolar – creates both opportunities and risks. This is most evident in Turkey’s balancing acts in Gaza and Ukraine. In Gaza, Turkey positions itself as a defender of Palestinian rights but struggles to reinvigorate its benevolent image within the Arab public and regional players after the last tumultuous decade. In Ukraine, it supplies military aid to Kyiv but maintains crucial economic ties with Moscow in contrast with its Western partners. In Syria, it tries to shape a stable political future while being ambiguous towards the Kurdish question and lacking material power compared to other regional players. These examples highlight how Turkey is “sailing turbulent geopolitical waters in the current non-polar world [order]....But without a coherent long-term vision, such actions could lead to further isolation and overextension.”<sup>17</sup> In such a scenario, Turkey’s balancing act presents opportunities for mediation but risks deepening dependency on Russia and complicating its relations with NATO and the West. At the same time, some might note that while the AKP has tried to redefine Turkish national interest, it has not eclipsed Kemalism in foreign policy overall but rather layered new ideologies onto it. As Dalacoura states, foreign policy is too complex to be dominated by a single individual or ideology, and while elements like neo-Ottomanism have been described as part of Turkey’s strategy, they function more as instruments of power projection than an all-encompassing shift in the country’s strategic direction.<sup>18</sup> Instead, an understanding of Turkish nationalism as homogeneous and monolithic continues to inform, if not dominate, the government’s approach to issues like the Kurdish question or the Cyprus issue.

At the same time, however, the leadership level continues to matter for the path TFP will follow. For instance, the 2024 municipal elections have revealed significant cracks in Erdoğan’s political dominance, with the opposition gaining ground in key urban centers and with “the images of new Islamist and conservative voices doubting the AKP’s pious image in issues like Gaza and its evolution into a new elite disconnected with the socioeconomic periphery.”<sup>19</sup> This has raised questions about how long Erdoğan can maintain internal elite cohesion while balancing his domestic and foreign policy priorities. The opposition’s advances, driven by dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of the economy and foreign affairs, may signal broader changes in Turkish politics. However, the unpredictable domestic instability erupted after the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu and shifting dynamics within a “renovated peace Kurdish process” could further

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<sup>17</sup> Conversation with a former Turkish diplomat right before submitting the thesis.

<sup>18</sup> Delacoura, 2017, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Conversation with a former Turkish MP.



limit Turkey's ability to sustain its international ambitions, especially as economic crises and internal sociopolitical dissatisfaction deepen.<sup>20</sup>

In light of these challenges, it is worth considering the potential impact of a change in leadership, not just within Turkey towards the 2028 elections but also in its major global partners. With a newly formed European Commission and a new Trump Presidency in the US, the future of TFP will be shaped by changes not only in Ankara but also in the West.<sup>21</sup> Yet, beyond external structural considerations, a new administration in Turkey may not immediately resolve long-standing issues like the Cyprus conflict or the Kurdish question. Still, it could bring about a shift in tone and a more diplomatic approach to relations with the EU and the US. "A less authoritarian government might prioritize democratic reforms and re-engage with Western partners, opening the door for more constructive cooperation on critical issues like human rights, migration, and economic recovery."<sup>22</sup> Yet, this will also depend on how Brussels and Washington will try to rebuild confidence mechanisms with Turkey. As Müftüler-Baç et al. have recently highlighted, "the next step in the maturation of EU foreign policy toolbox with strategic partnerships at its center would involve a comprehensive review of the existing partnerships together with increased vertical coherence, [which] might enable the EU to close the gap between its own actorness and the external challenges it currently confronts."<sup>23</sup> The 2022 Strategic Compass made that also clear regarding the EU's stance towards Turkey, where it is referred to as a "strategic partner" rather than an accession country. While this categorization is different than the EU's official designation of strategic partners, Turkey's multiple ties to the EU in various policy areas bring forth an informal reference to Turkey as one of the strategic partners.<sup>24</sup> Looking ahead, the future of US-Turkey relations remains uncertain but strategically important. Both countries will need to focus on rebuilding trust and managing divergences on key issues like Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza. Turkey's recent approval of Sweden's NATO accession and potential F-16 sales from Washington offers a window of opportunity, but longer-term collaboration will require addressing divergent visions in both countries. In Turkey, anti-American sentiments now go well beyond the AKP's electorate, also undermining traditionally pro-Western officials' positions. In Washington, "the debate is about those who would push for a harsh anti-Turkey policy as for Iran and those who would still engage with Turkey approaching any issue

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<sup>20</sup> Esen, B. & Gumuscu, S. After Crackdown, Is Turkey an Autocracy?. *Journal of Democracy*, 2025.

<sup>21</sup> See Abrami, S. C. A. (2025). What's up with US-Turkey Relations? Between International Turmoil and Trump 2.0. *IPC-Mercator Analysis*. <https://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/en/abrami-samuele-carlo-ayrton-a247ee>.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with a former Turkish Ambassador.

<sup>23</sup> Müftüler-Baç, M., Aydın-Düzgit, S., & Uzun-Teker, E. (2024). The EU's global strategic partner(ship): A tool for the maturation of European foreign policy? *European Security*, 445.

<sup>24</sup> Müftüler-Baç, M. (2023). Turkey's Influence as a Third Country on the European Union: From Association to a Key Partner. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 61(6), 1471–1487.

with a *la carte* approach. [This second faction] recognizes the potential role of Turkey in stabilizing the Black Sea and the Middle East amid the two ongoing conflicts in its neighborhood [...] but also genuinely hopes to slowly improve relations on the basis that leadership will change sooner or later.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, also the US and the UE should clarify their position towards Turkey through confidence-(re)building mechanisms. As noted in US circles, establishing a more stable and mutually rewarding relationship that complements Europe’s own goals of strategic autonomy and sustainable competitiveness is not “a pipe dream as Turkey’s joining the EU.” Instead, better relations with Turkey are in the geo-economic interests of Europe and the strategic interests of Washington. “If Turkey had a better relationship with the West, it would be less tempted by BRICS membership.”<sup>26</sup> Concretely, this means considering that Turkey could help shape Europe’s current and post-Ukraine-war scenarios, particularly by supporting European defense and reducing reliance on China through its large manufacturing sector. Seemingly, as emerged in the September 2024 UN General Assembly, Washington and Brussels should engage Turkey on global governance reforms and address its concerns – shared with other Western countries – about double standards. The US and Europe must also find ways to stabilize relations with Turkey and clarify how Ankara fits in Europe’s pursuit of greater geopolitical actorness. In this regard, Turkey’s tilt towards BRICS might represent an occasion to begin a revision in areas that are already solid – as in the case of trade – but that need modernization – as in the case of the Customs Union and visa liberalization.

From the Turkish side, this implies a change of direction as well. Domestically, “the recipe for success in this fragile political context would be to move away from religious and ethnic cleavages and focus on addressing the concerns of mass voters...[...].”<sup>27</sup> As many interviews with the author highlighted if Turkey transitions to a less authoritarian and more pluralistic political environment, it could stabilize its domestic situation and improve its standing in the international community. Such a shift would likely improve Turkey’s relations with the EU and the West and enhance its long-term strategic positioning. This change could also push Turkey to recalibrate its foreign policy, focusing less on unilateral actions and more on multilateral diplomacy and regional cooperation. Rather than continuing its pursuit of strategic autonomy in assertive terms, Turkey could aim to become a “responsible middle power,” leveraging its geopolitical position to foster stability and cooperation in the region.<sup>28</sup> This does not imply “renouncing to take advantage of the geo-economic opportunities arising from other poles,” but that by focusing on pragmatic diplomacy and

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<sup>25</sup> Conversation with an expert on Turkey-US relations.

<sup>26</sup> Aydıntaşbaş, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with observers of domestic politics for an upcoming paper by the author.

<sup>28</sup> Aran, A., & Kutlay, M. (2024). Turkey’s Quest for Strategic Autonomy in an Era of Multipolarity. *IPC-Mercator*.

mediating between conflicting global interests, Turkey could reduce the risks of overextension and align its ambitions with its economic and political realities. Yet, at the time of submitting this thesis in March 2025, facts talk about the risk of increasing authoritarian tendencies that would seriously undermine the credibility, availability, and sustainability of certain options at all the levels examined in this thesis.

In conclusion, to avoid losing what fragile stability remains, instead of “having one’s cake and eating it too,” Turkey must consider recalibrating its ambitions, focusing on domestic socioeconomic stabilization and a more pragmatic, cooperative role on the international and regional level. Otherwise, as a Turkish proverb wisely warns, “*Dimyat’a pirince giderken, evdeki bulgurdan olmak.*”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The sense would be that Turkey risks losing what it has at home while chasing greater, unattainable ambitions abroad.



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