Israel Affairs

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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This article explores Turkey's changing foreign policy approach towards the Middle East after the spread of the Arab upheavals to Syria. Instead of preserving the status quo, Ankara has turned to a revisionist state that has begun to threaten Middle Eastern governments. While Turkey was reluctant to join the foreign military interventions against Middle Eastern regimes, (e.g. Libya) it has been instrumental in immersing NATO in the Syrian civil war. Such transformation ultimately undermines analyses that define Turkey as the kingmaker of the Middle East.

Keywords: Turkey; foreign policy; international regimes; 'Arab Spring'

The popularity of Turkey and Erdogan within the Arab world has already allowed the AKP (Justice and Development Party) to turn traditional Turkish foreign policy on its head by drawing strength from its common heritage and history with its Middle Eastern neighbors rather than being a handicap. Turkish foreign policy under the AKP has come to articulate a vision for improving relations with all its neighbours, particularly by privileging its former Ottoman space in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria where agreements are being negotiated for a free-trade zone and an eventual Middle Eastern Union. The growing economic and political engagement of Turkey with the Middle East has already led to a significant realignment in the region.[1]

Thus wrote Joshua Walker on 3 February 2011 in *Foreign Policy*. This article portrayed Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the kingmaker of the Middle East due to his support for the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, highlighting Turkish domestic approval of this support with an image of Turkish protestors holding anti-Mubarak banners.

Until the 'Arab Spring' reached Syria in February 2011, Walker and like-minded scholars were justified in believing that there was a causal connection between Turkey's new foreign policy behaviour, which deviates significantly from the traditional and non-involvement-based understanding of the Turkish Republic's foreign policy, and the major political changes in the Middle East.

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Indeed, after the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Paritsi – AKP) government was formed in 2002, Turkey's activism towards the Middle East region had already been gaining significant momentum. During this period, Turkey established extensive trade relations with Middle Eastern countries, attempted to moderate the nuclear crisis between Iran and the West, mediated peace talks between Israel and Syria, signed oil and natural gas pipeline projects, and engaged in Iraq's domestic political competition, the Israel–Palestine quagmire and the Arab awakenings. In essence, Turkey has actively promoted its economic relations with Middle Eastern countries and aimed to play a politically determinative role in the Middle East without using instruments of hard power.[2]

However, this picture changed dramatically after the 'Arab Spring' spread to Syria and threatened the Ba'athist regime of Bashar Assad. Turkey's Middle East policy, which has opposed the militarization of the region during the AKP governments, has been replaced by a new agenda based on military solutions. Upon the escalation of the crisis and the AKP government's accusations of the Assad regime's massacre of the opposition, bilateral relations that had once been very close collapsed altogether. During this period, Erdoğan stated that Turkey is ready to ask NATO for military intervention in Syria. In addition, following the deaths of Turkish citizens as a result of clashes between Assad forces and opposition groups, the Turkish parliament approved a resolution authorizing the Turkish military to cross into Syria. Furthermore, Turkey's worsening relations with the Assad regime also affected its relations with the governments of Iraq and Iran. Following Turkey's NATO request for Patriot missiles to protect against the potential aggression of the Assad government, Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff Hasan Firuzabadi suggested that the Patriot missile system's deployment in Turkey might trigger the possibility of a new world war.[3] Iraqi Premier Nouri Maliki also strongly criticized Turkey's Syria policy and accused Turkey of trying to draw NATO forces into the Syrian conflict just to defend Turkey when, in fact, there was no threat to defend Turkey against.[4]

Building on these recent developments, one can ask the question why Turkey's new activist foreign policy lost its footing so quickly in the Middle East and why Turkey's 'kingmaker' image was toppled by its own Syria policy. This study aims to explore the changing foreign policy approach of Turkey towards the Middle East after the 'Arab Spring' spread to Syria. In doing so, this paper first discusses the theoretical framework of Turkey's Middle East policy before and after the 'Arab Spring' reached Syria. The theoretical comparison of these periods helps to identify the conditions that led to changes in Turkey's foreign policy behaviour. The study then compares these two periods by focusing on Turkey's approaches towards the conflicts in the Middle East in order to test whether these conditions have changed.

Understanding Turkey's regional activism in the Middle East

While Ankara's regional activism is clearly evident under the three successive AKP governments (2002–present), different approaches are suggested to explain this increasing role of Turkey as a major foreign policy actor in the Middle East. These explanations, however, are largely anecdotal and as such are not grounded in any theoretical framework with explicit assumptions regarding the link between conditions and behaviour. This article attempts to fill that void by engaging several theoretical frameworks offered in the discipline of International Relations (IR) in order to understand how Turkish foreign policy's paradigm changed after 'Arab Spring'. The following section identifies potential explanations derived from three branches of IR theory: structural realism, constructivism and rational choice theory.

Structural realism: systemic factors and the shifts in hegemonic behaviour

Explanations derived from structural realism might suggest that Turkey's increased activism in the Middle East is due to conditions arising from the 9/11 terrorist attacks including the subsequent declaration of the Bush doctrine. According to such a deterministic explanation, the structure of the international system constrains the formulation of policy by state leaders, irrespective of their personal intellects and domestic ideologies in the realm of foreign policy. Thus, there is a causal mechanism between the changing Middle East policy of the US, which is the hegemonic state in the international system, and Turkey's regional activism.

According to Keyman, Turkey's regional engagement is a logical consequence of the changing global environment of the post-9/11 era. He argues that novel elements in global turmoil load new burdens on the shoulders of Turkey, thus requiring Turkey to increase its presence in various issue areas. Becoming involved in the complex issues of the Middle East is one of these new burdens. Therefore, Turkey's pro-active foreign policy towards the Middle East is Turkey's response to the realities of the existing international system.[5]

Altunışık and Martin also highlight the influence of structural factors in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East, arguing that the US invasion of Iraq changed the structure of the Middle East's regional politics. This structural change created opportunities and incentives for Turkey to play a more active role in the Middle East. Accordingly, the threat of transnational Kurdish nationalism stemming from a highly unstable post-Saddam Iraq produced a realignment of relations among Turkey, Iran and Syria. On the other hand, with Iraq effectively removed as a potential regional player, the Gulf States regarded Turkey as a counter-balance to Iran.[6] In the final analysis, it was the change in US policy towards the Middle East in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks that paved the way for Turkey to have closer ties with Middle Eastern states, rather than Turkey's own incentives, capabilities and leadership.

Constructivism: Islamic identity

Those applying a constructivist approach to explain the shifts in Turkey's foreign policy would point to the influence of identity factors, which can serve to prescribe particular appropriate forms of behaviour and alliances for a state with a particular identity. In the Turkish case, critics of the AKP underline the influence of the Islamist background of the party elite and particularly their past involvement in explicitly politically Islamist parties over Turkish foreign policy. In a strategic move, AKP elites departed from the anti-Western and radical discourse of political Islam after 28 February 1997 when the Turkish military's ultimatum forced the government of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to resign. Although Erbakan insisted on defending the political ideas and rhetoric of Islamism, the younger generation of his Welfare Party – including Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç – formed the AKP and portrayed themselves as strong advocates of democracy, civilian control of the military, the EU membership process and a free market economy. This remarkable 'U-turn' for these figures was not without reason. According to Tibi, the AKP's commitment to the EU and democracy is the product of its instrumental concerns rather than a philosophical alignment.[7] AKP elites were aware that democracy could limit the influence of the military over the political system and, given their experience with the military in the past, aimed to ease the military out of politics. Critics of the AKP's foreign policy also argue that its pro-Western discourse is pragmatic since it aims to avert the pressure of the army, which regards itself as the guardian of the secular Republic. Whatever the motivations behind the AKP's moderation of its political approach, the party undeniably has Islamist roots and, according to a constructivist explanation of Turkey's foreign policy shift, these roots influence Turkey's policy towards the Middle East. From this perspective, the AKP government's Islamist identity and its prescription of closer ties with fellow Muslim states determines Turkey's regional activism rather than national interests defined purely in materialist terms.[8] This constructivist approach, therefore, explains Turkey's foreign policy behaviour towards the Middle East by focusing on the identity composition of AKP elites.

Rational choice theory: maximizing gains in a multi-dimensional environment

According to a rational choice argument, the AKP pursues a multi-dimensional foreign policy and successfully links its increasing influence in the Middle East in order to bolster its position in the West. Intellectual circles supporting the AKP's foreign policy framework, for instance, highlight the importance of interconnectedness between Turkey and its Eastern neighbours. From this perspective, Turkey has left behind the geo-political alignments of the Cold War, which had required it to be committed to the Western security system while neglecting other foreign policy opportunities. By the time the AKP took office, however, this picture had changed and Turkey placed 'all foreign policy areas and issues into a single picture of policy formulation'.[9] The scope of Turkish

foreign policy has thus both broadened and gained momentum, particularly in the Middle East.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of AKP's foreign policy, defines the rationality of Turkey's engagement in the Middle East by employing a 'bow and arrow' analogy. The 'bow and arrow' analogy, defining Turkey as an archer, implies that the more Turkey draws the string of the bow through the East, the farther the arrow flies West.[10] The main implication of this analogy is the interconnectedness between Turkey's policy towards the West and the Middle East. Turkey's ultimate goal is to be a regular member of the Western state system.[11] Thus, Turkey's regional activism could be leverage for its Westernization process. In other words, Turkey's contributions to the Western security architecture by being involved in the complexities of the Middle East might facilitate its relations with the Western states.[12]

This approach regards the rationality of Turkey's decision-making mechanism as the key factor of it foreign policy. Accordingly, Turkey's engagement in the Middle East is not dictated by structural changes and identity obsessions, but is the deliberate consequence of the ruling elite's rational choices. Rather than fully ignoring the cultural-historical and ideational ties between Turkey and the Middle East as more ascetic rational choice approaches might do, in Davutoğlu's strategic depth proposition such ties are featured as elements of a country's power. In addition to material power potential, social identity is regarded as leverage that increases the power capabilities of a country.[13] The role attributed to social identities is thus pragmatic; identities are viewed as tools serving the national interest of a country. According to Davutoğlu, as the crossroads of a European identity and Eastern identities – including Middle Eastern, Central Asian and Caucasian – Turkey is a unique case in terms of identity. In benefiting from this unique position, Turkey has the ability to pursue a multi-dimensional foreign policy in both the West and the East.[14]

Reviewing Turkey's Middle East policy under AKP governments from different theoretical perspectives helps us to understand the factors that each of these explanations take into account – and those which they do not. This review makes clear, for example, that none of the above-mentioned explanations factors in the role of foreign military interventions of the Western states in the Middle East. These explanations assume that the Middle East and the West are separate regions and there is no conflictual relationship between them. That is to say, they do not address Turkey's standpoint during times when Western states use hard power and violate the sovereignty of the Middle Eastern states.

This article therefore argues that without examining Turkey's policy towards the conflicts between the Middle East and the West, a full understanding of Turkey's shifts in foreign policy is not possible. In particular, this paper examines the case of whether and how the 'Arab Spring' changed Turkey's foreign policy behaviour towards the Middle East. As noted previously, until the 'Arab Spring' reached Syria, Turkey was expected to be the kingmaker of the Middle East by employing a foreign policy based on instruments of soft power. However,

Turkey's policy has changed and its Middle Eastern neighbours have accused Turkey of exaggerating the Syrian crisis in order to use its military power by drawing NATO forces into the Syrian conflict. In sum, a new, more comprehensive theoretical approach is required to explain Turkey's policy shift following the 'Arab Spring'.

From agenda-setter state to agenda-enterpreneur state

It is arguable that Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East has changed since the 'Arab Spring' reached Syria. Furthermore, such transformation indicates that existing approaches, attempting to explain Turkish foreign policy during the AKP governments, fail to acknowledge the importance of international regimes and Turkey's tendency to set agendas during and after conflict processes. This paper demonstrates that Turkey's shifting policy toward the Middle East can be understood by analysing the changing nature of the relationship between Turkey and international regimes, especially when the Middle East experiences foreign interventions.

The behavioural pattern of AKP governments before the 'Arab Spring' can be expressed with the help of the complex interdependence theory developed by Keohane and Nye, with which students of International Relations are quite familiar. According to these scholars, realist literature explains states' behaviour based on their power-seeking and interest-maximizing nature and inadequately acknowledges the role of international organizations. While the pursuit of security serves as the primary determinant of international relations in early realist literature, world developments contributed to the erosion of inter-agenda hierarchies and the rise of an increasingly diverse set of issues. The need to resolve novel problems linked to these emerging issues, in turn, boosted the need for international organizations. Moreover, international organizations paved the way for new political agendas and greater influence for smaller governments. In this context, weaker states were able to link certain issues with their individual political agendas, thus attaining greater political bargaining power, while also making use of single-vote systems to safeguard their interests against states with greater material power by building coalitions within international organizations established around certain issues.[15]

In line with Keohane and Nye's theoretical framework, the AKP era of Turkish foreign policy attempted to deal with the interventions in countries in the Middle East region through international regimes, due to a lack of sufficient material power to prevent such processes unilaterally. This effort stemmed from the concern that Turkey would be excluded from agendas that emerged after unilateral interventions and therefore be deprived of its influence over future, potentially very complex, developments. As a matter of fact, Turkey's participation in the Afghanistan and Libya operations as part of NATO forces and its initiation of the Neighboring Countries of Iraq Platform following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq were the product of Turkey's need to intervene in

ongoing processes via international organizations and platforms. Furthermore, Turkey's participation in such multilateral fora on non-military issues as well as issues regarding present and post-conflict scenarios may also be accounted for with reference to the argument that international organizations may assist in bridging different agendas.

On the other hand, this neoliberalist approach focusing on institutional cooperation cannot explain Turkey's Middle East policy following the diffusion of the 'Arab Spring'. Prior to this regional transformation, Turkey had rejected any combatant role in the foreign interventions in the Middle East and aimed to exert influence over conflicts via the use of international platforms and a soft power agenda. In doing so, Turkey used a strategy of issue linkage, which refers to attempts to affect a specfic agenda by using other issue areas. In this period, the use of non-military issues in order to shape these intervention processes characterized Turkish foreign policy. However, Turkey's behaviour deviated from this pattern following the Syrian conflict. Instead of shaping an already-existing agenda, Turkey formulated its own agenda based on military solutions for the Syria crisis and aimed to mobilize NATO members to intervene. In explaining the motives behind Turkey's changing policy İdiz offers a somewhat constructivist explanation, arguing that Turkey's approach towards the 'Arab Spring' has been shaped by the fact that Sunni oppostion under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood has become the winner of this process. After the fall of formerly entrenched regimes, there has been increasing cross-border cooperation between Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood, which came to power in Tunisia and Egypt. Furthermore, such cooperation is more visible with Sunni groups like Hamas and the Syrian opposition than Shiite groups such as Hezbollah and the Shiite opposition in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.[16] In so doing, it could be argued that the AKP government aims to exploit the post-Assad period by maintaining this cooperation. This is to say, Turkey's changing Middle East policy expects that the downfall of Assad might create an axis of the regimes that are in an ideological solidarity with Turkey.

This new policy of exploitation-via-cooperation is better explained by realist theories, which regard international organizations as a tool for power and security maximization rather than independent actors changing the interest calculations of states. In other words, Turkey's new Middle East policy seems to be based on using the military capacity of NATO and the United States in order to consolidate its kingmaker position in the Middle East while its previous policy was grounded in utilizing instrunments of soft power to influence conflict and post-conflict processes produced by the military agression of these actors.

Regional activism's trial with foreign interventions

During the period between 2002, when the AKP took the office, and 2011, when Turkey's Middle East policy changed following the spread of the Arab upheavals to Syria, three military interventions occurred in the Middle East. These are

NATO's operations in Afghanistan and Libya in 2002 and 2011 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. These conflicts should be examined in order to make a comparative analysis between Turkey's position during these crises and its policy towards Syria after the 'Arab Spring'.

NATO – Afghanistan – Turkey

Following the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 in which over 3000 people lost their lives, Afghanistan became the United States' primary military target. President George W. Bush's address in the attacks' immediate aftermath declared that evidence linked the attacks to Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida terrorist organization, and ordered all terrorists to be captured dead or alive. The US government demanded that Afghanistan's Taliban regime turn over Bin Laden, who was charged with orchestrating the 9/11 attacks, but the regime refused to honour that request despite lengthy negotiations. The Taliban's negative response to the US marked the beginning of an anticipated attack.

Following these developments, the Turkish government announced that it would offer unconditional support to any US military operation against Afghanistan. Furthermore, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit argued that the US must intervene in Afghanistan to topple the Taliban even if Bin Laden left the country, as the regime in question was archaic. In addition, Turkey sent a letter to the US administration informing it of the availability of Turkish airports for use in case of an operation. Once again, Ecevit noted that Turkey possessed considerable intelligence data on Afghanistan and emphasized that the country could thus contribute to a US military operation. However, Turkey did not wish its support to be seen internationally as an interventionist act.[17] President Ahmet Necdet Sezer framed Turkey's contributions as an effort to establish a democratic regime and thereby prevent foreign interventions.[18]

On the other hand, it would not be incorrect to claim that Turkey's Afghanistan policy under the AKP was defined with greater clarity and in accordance with a 'soft power' framework. Turkey contributed approximately 300 servicemen to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a NATO-associated multinational peace force that was established following American and British troops' entry into Afghanistan on 7 October 2001 and the Taliban regime's overthrow. Turkey was in command of ISAF twice (June 2002–February 2003 and February 2003–February 2005), increased the number of its troops by up to 1300 at a time, and took over Kabul Regional Command with nearly 1800 servicemen for a one-year term from 31 October 2009. It is necessary to underscore, however, that Turkey – unlike other NATO member countries – designated all its forces as non-combatant units.

Indeed, Prime Minister Erdoğan regularly pointed out that Turkey's military presence in the region was not geared toward combat and instead played an important role for training the Afghan state's security forces, and that these

efforts were part of longer-term development-oriented investments.[19] In this context, the Turkish Provincial Reconstruction Team, stationed 40 km west of Kabul and led by a civilian diplomat, successfully completed over 200 socio-cultural projects with help from the Turkish Cooperation Development Agency (TIKA).

Other statements by Erdoğan also hinted at the AKP government's distance from the NATO operation in Afghanistan and insistence on not designating Turkish troops as a combatant force. Erdoğan claimed that military solutions would fail to address Afghanistan's pressing problems and argued that the local population's sympathy toward Turkish forces stemmed from their close relations with the locals and their provision of desired services. These statements indicated that Turkish troops' assumption of combatant status would undermine Turkey's regional influence. For instance, in response to a question regarding the prospects of Turkey becoming a combatant nation in Afghanistan, Prime Minister Erdoğan made the following statement to define Turkish troops' mission:

> We increased the size of our military personnel from 700 to 1,750. Right now, we are doing all we can there [in Afghanistan]. If you are asking me what else is on the table, we are able to provide training to Afghan security forces. Our military and our police forces are ready for that. We undertook important efforts in terms of infrastructure. We have $150 million worth of investments at this time. All these are steps taken to carry our historical proximity with the Afghan people into the future.[20]

NATO–Libya–Turkey

The NATO intervention in Libya, which was a smaller-scale repetition of the military operation in Afghanistan, indicates that the AKP-era Turkish foreign policy repeats itself in line with a certain model. In the face of resistance movements that began in Benghazi and later expanded to Tripoli and Misrata, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) first adopted on 27 February 2011 its Resolution 1970 proposing an embargo against Libya, and then formulated Resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011 that established a no-fly zone to prevent the Qaddafi regime's continued attacks against the opposition. This resolution outlawed all flights in Libyan airspace except for humanitarian aid and froze all assets belonging to the Libyan National Oil Corporation and the Libyan Central Bank. The UNSC also mandated member states to take all measures, unilaterally or through regional organizations, to protect civilians against attacks perpetrated by the Qaddafi forces. In other words, the resolution paved the way for an international military intervention to stop Qaddafi.[21]

The operation initiated by the Americans, French and British (also known as the 'Paris Coalition') on 18 March amidst continual news of violent conflict from the region despite the UN resolution was transferred to NATO command on 29 March.[22] However, adopting a clear stance vis-à-vis the domestic struggle in Libya that began in February and eventually triggered international military intervention proved to be difficult for Turkey. When developments in Libya were

met with strong reactions from the international community and talk of a possible NATO intervention became more widely aired, Prime Minister Erdoğan questioned on 28 February what NATO was to do in Libya, stating on 14 March that NATO's military intervention in the country would be to no avail and possibly even lead to more dangerous consequences.[23] Nevertheless, the French and British governments' hasty and enthusiastic proposition to act on the UNSC's 17 March resolution made it necessary for Turkey to reconsider its stance. This necessity became more obvious when Turkey was not invited to a meeting held in Paris to discuss how Resolution 1973 would be enforced. Turkey thus revised Erdoğan's previous statements and advocated the view that a likely intervention in Libya would operate within the NATO framework.[24] This move aimed to integrate the country into the military planning process.

However, Turkey also made clear that its support for the NATO operation in Libya was not unrestricted. These reservations were rooted, as in Afghanistan, in the Turkish government's unwillingness to be perceived as a foreign occupation force and a foreign combatant nation. In this context, the country demanded that the operation was not geared toward the invasion of Libya and that land operation was not on the table. In addition, Turkey pushed for a resolution that would provide Libyans with the ownership of the country's natural resources and develop steps that would only minimally affect the local population. In this sense, Erdoğan declared that his government did not intend to fight or bomb the Libyan people and would withdraw from the country as quickly as possible. He also pointed out that Turkey was ready to take over the port of Benghazi as well as the local airport – both under the rebels' control – in order to facilitate the transportation of humanitarian aid and to make clear that Turkey's military presence was strictly non-combatant.[25]

US–Iraq–Turkey

Turkey's AKP-era regional activism policy experienced one other external intervention. However, unlike the Afghanistan and Libya operations, the US military operation against Iraq in 2003 took place in the absence of an international organization such as NATO, in which Turkey is a member state. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the difference in these cases will reveal whether or not Turkish foreign policy remains consistent in the face of foreign interventions in areas where Turkey practises activism.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the US government's counter-terrorism agenda shifted its focus to Iraq after Afghanistan, and a US-led coalition force initiated the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Prior to the invasion, US demands for Turkey to participate in the operation were rendered inconclusive as the Turkish parliament resisted being part of the invasion on 1 March 2003. In this new period, Turkey focused its foreign policy instruments on the 'Neighbouring Countries of Iraq Platform' initiative that was intended to make room for Turkey in Iraq's reconstruction process.

The Neighbouring Countries of Iraq initiative's primary goal was to safeguard the country's territorial integrity. The Platform initially rose to prominence in January 2003 with the help of steps taken by Turkey.[26] In this period, the aim was to prevent an American invasion of Iraq to topple the Saddam Hussein regime, and to develop a peaceful solution through diplomatic means. Despite the United States' initial opposition to the initiative due to the Bush administration's decisively pro-invasion stance, the first meeting to begin the process took place on 23 January 2003 in Istanbul at the foreign minister-level. Representatives from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran and Syria attended this summit. A series of meetings took place in Cairo the following year and continued in later years, including a 2006 Tehran meeting in which then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül was among the participants. Although the US government reacted negatively to Turkey joining countries such as Iran and Syria in this kind of setting, it later warmed to the Neighbours of Iraq Platform, as the security deficit in Iraq worsened and the invasion led to unanticipated consequences. In this sense, the ambassador-level meeting that took place in Baghdad on 10 March 2007 was a turning point, as this was the first time that the United States, Iran and Syria had met together in quite a while.[27] Aside from Iraq's neighbouring countries, the UNSC's five permanent members and representatives from the G-8 countries were also in attendance at the meeting. The United States' participation in the Baghdad summit led to discussions of whether the country's Iraq strategy was shifting from war to diplomacy.

Over time, the meetings became an important venue for the resolution of the Iraq issue, in which regional countries voiced their support for the country's territorial integrity, political unity as well as the ongoing political process and the government in Iraq. In its new form, the Extended Neighbouring Countries of Iraq initiative's first meeting was held at the foreign minister-level in the Egyptian city of Sharm el Sheikh in May 2007.[28] This summit led to a resolution to speed up the establishment of three working groups regarding security and border safety cooperation, aid for Iraqi refugees, and Iraq's energy and electricity needs. The second meeting of the Extended Neighbouring Countries of Iraq initiative took place in Istanbul in November 2007.[29] High-level representatives from Turkey, Iraq, Bahrain, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Great Britain attended this meeting along with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon.[30]

American, Iranian and Syrian foreign ministers sharing a table during the luncheon before the meeting's initiation with PM Erdoğan's opening speech attracted worldwide media attention.[31] Observers also regarded it a historical development that Rice, who had not attended the Sharm el Sheikh summit's working luncheon due to tensions with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, joined Iranian and Iraqi representatives under Turkey's auspices.[32]

This picture shows that there was indeed consistency in Turkey's behaviour when the Middle East experienced foreign military interventions. As discussed

previously, Turkey's regional activism was based on non-military means such as diplomacy and development, while external interventions used instruments of hard power. Such a discrepancy inevitably created challenges for Turkey's Middle East policy. Turkey did not have sufficient power to prevent such interventions, as the US invasion of Iraq and the NATO operation in Libya cases showed. Furthermore, its membership in NATO compelled Turkey to be a part of such interventions, as seen in the cases of Afghanistan and Libya. Nevertheless, Turkey could find a third way between non-intervention, which could undermine Turkey's relations with Western states, and military engagement, which could weaken Turkey's regional activism policy.

The first principle of Turkey's policy is 'non-military engagement', which refers to engagement based on humanitarian and development issues. For example, although Turkey joined NATO forces in operations in Afghanistan and Libya, Turkish political elites highlighted Turkey's non-combatant role and underscored Turkey's contribution to the post-conflict development. The second principle involves the use of international organizations and platforms as a tool to mould the agenda of external intervention. While Turkey's membership in NATO enabled Turkey to set and shape the agenda in Afghanistan and Libya, its attempts to form the 'Neighbouring Countries of Iraq' platform aimed to influence the agenda of the US in the post-conflict process. These behavioural patterns shifted dramatically after the 'Arab Spring' reached Syria, as is demonstrated below.

Turkey and Syria

Lessons learned from the above discussion will be apllied here to provide a better explanation for Turkey's shift in foreign policy following the spread of the 'Arab Spring' to Syria. The 'Arab Spring' that arose out of popular demonstrations for democracy and freedom in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya spread to affect Syria from March 2011 onward. New developments in Syria left Turkey in a dilemma regarding its relations with Bashar Assad and initiated a tense period in bilateral relations.[33] Despite having promised to introduce democratic reforms, anti-corruption measures and precautions to safeguard and develop human rights in the country, Assad failed to provide a political solution that satisfied the Syrian opposition. As a result of this failure, the revolutionary movement has turned into a civil war, becoming internationalized and thereby affecting Turkish–Syrian relations.

In his August 2011 meeting with Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, Assad stated that he would 'not give up on his struggle against terrorists'.[34] Rapidly deteriorating bilateral relations worsened in April 2012 as Assad forces' attacks against opponents escaping toward the Turkish border injured a Turkish citizen.[35] The Turkish government issued a diplomatic note to Syria following the Houla Massacre of 25 May 2012 to announce that it was suspending all diplomatic relations and resolved to deport all Syrian diplomatic personnel.[36] However, the

most notable breaking point in Turkish–Syrian relations was Syria's downing of a Turkish F-4 Phantom fighter jet during a training flight on 22 June 2012.[37] In his statement following the incident, Erdoğan declared that the conflict had entered a new stage in which Syria represented 'a clear and proximate threat' to Turkey's security. Erdoğan also stated that

> We will employ our rights under international law and take necessary steps. A new stage began with the most recent incident. Turkey will not tolerate the security risks that Syria presents at our borders and will not leave these unanswered. We have therefore altered the Turkish Armed Forces' rules of engagement in line with this new stage.[38]

In official protest against the Syrian government, Turkey also called for a meeting of NATO members. The summit at the organization's headquarters in Brussels resulted in NATO support for Turkey and a condemnation of the Syrian government.[39] In his first statement regarding the fighter jet-downing incident, on 3 July 2012 Assad announced that Syria had hit the jet with anti-aircraft battery without knowing its Turkish origin and expressed his regret for the incident. Once pieces of the aircraft and the pilots' bodies were recovered, Turkey stationed troops from its 6th Army Command near the Syrian border and equipped these with anti-aircraft artillery. At the same time, Ankara assigned Gaziantep Airport military status in order to station missile ramps at this facility. Furthermore, the 4th Artillery Battalion originally stationed in Şanlıurfa was repositioned by the border.

A new crisis followed as Syrian artillery fire hit Akçakale, Şanlıurfa and claimed the lives of five Turkish civilians. Following the incident, Turkey took a notable step against Syria by firing warning shots against its neighbour and killing 34 Syrian military personnel.[40] Artillery fire against Akçakale and Turkey's subsequent response received worldwide media coverage, with many media outlets describing the event as 'the most serious escalation' since the Syrian civil war's outbreak. A *New York Times* story entitled 'Turkey Strikes Back After Syrian Shelling Kills 5 Civilians' noted that the Turkish government made 'a move that increases the risk of escalating the bloody civil war into a regional conflict' and underlined that the Akçakale affair could pressure the West into military intervention.[41] Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* maintained that Turkey was the first country to hit Syria since the beginning of the civil war and pointed out that the retaliation marked 'the first time Turkey has shelled a foreign states' armed forces since its incursion into Cyprus'.[42]

A NATO summit at the ambassadorial level convened following the incident and condemned the Syrian government for its actions.[43] In his address to the Turkish parliament following the attack on Akçakale that resulted in five casualties, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that the legislative body's approval of the government's mandate for military involvement in Syria 'made a warning to the Syrian government'.[44] Damascus, on the other hand, issued an apology and offered its condolences for civilian losses that resulted from the incident. On 10 October, Turkey forced a Syrian A-320 passenger plane to land at

Ankara airport, rekindling tensions between the two countries.[45] The Turkish government also issued a diplomatic note to the Syrian consulate in Istanbul citing 'a violation of civil aviation guidelines'. Mahmoud Said, the Syrian minister of transport, described the forced landing as 'piracy'.[46] Prime Minister Erdoğan, however, declared that the Syrian aircraft's cargo included ammunition.[47]

By this point, Turkey had assumed a clearly anti-Assad and pro-opposition stance and called upon NATO members for support, citing Syria's potential threat and use of chemical weapons. Consequently, the organization resolved to station Patriot missiles on Turkish soil for defensive purposes.[48] This step not only put an end to Turkey's isolation but also ensured NATO involvement in the affair. As such, any future hostility towards Turkey would also concern other NATO members. In the face of criticism from domestic opposition and foreign governments such as Iran and Russia, Prime Minister Erdoğan defended Ankara's request for Patriot missiles as 'an entirely defensive, precautionary measure ... to protect our people and boost [our] deterrence [capacity]' and therefore ruled out the missiles' aggressive use.[49]

Against the background of Turkey's ongoing search for an appropriate location to station NATO's Patriot missiles against potential threats from Syria, the government also conducted bilateral negotiations with the United States for another missile defence system. Ankara intended to obtain Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missiles that would offer a more advanced complementary element to the Patriot Air Defence Missile System. To this end, the United States government offered to temporarily loan one of the THAAD missiles to Turkey.[50] Turkish fighter jets conducted armed flights over the border region for the first time following Syria's aerial bombardment of Rasulayn, a Syrian town across the border from Ceylanpınar, Şanlıurfa. Military sources indicated that Turkish fighter jets conducted armed flights for the first time and right on the border – as opposed to earlier cases where they handled discovery and reconnaissance missions further away from the border.[51]

Upon these developments, Syria, Iran and Iraq reacted strongly to Turkey's request from NATO to station Patriot missiles along its southern border. The Syrian government condemned the step as 'a new provocation'.[52] The deputy foreign minister of Syria, Faisal al-Mikdad, claimed that Turkey had gone bankrupt and therefore begged NATO countries for help. He also accused the Turkish government of financing and training terrorists as well as facilitating al-Qaida members' entry into Syrian territory.[53]

Iran became the country most critical of Turkey's request. General Seyed Hassan Firuzabadi, chief of staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, claimed that the Patriot missiles' stationing in Turkey was an effort to protect Israel and demanded that Ankara return the missiles before the situation escalated into a full-blown war, warning that the missiles could lead to World War III.[54] Similarly, Iranian Minister of Defence Ahmad Vahidi commented that NATO missiles would only harm Turkey and suggested that the country 'jeopardized its

own security by stationing Patriot missiles in its territory'.[55] In addition to these statements, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei's chief military advisor General Yadullah Javani maintained that Turkey's decision to station Patriot missiles was a strategic mistake and warned that 'Ankara shall pay a greater price than before and experience more harm if the Patriots are a prelude to a military intervention in Syria'.[56]

On the other hand, Iraqi Premier Maliki regarded Turkey's policy towards Syria as a threat to regional stability. He posited that Iraq is against NATO intervention in Syria on the grouds of defending Turkey as Turkey is not under a threat from Syria and because NATO intervention might precipitate a regional war. According to Maliki, Turkey aims to impose its foreign policy agenda on Syria by dragging NATO into conflict. In regard to Turkey's Iraq policy,[57] Maliki also accused Turkey of being a hostile state interfering in the internal affairs of Iraq and of supporting sectarianism in order to consolidate its regional hegemony in the Middle East.[58]

Building on this discussion of Turkey's relations with Syria after the 'Arab Spring', it becomes clear that the terms 'security', 'threat' and 'use of force' dominate the foreign policy agenda. Unlike the period of regional activism that characterized the AKP's Middle East policy until the 'Arab Spring' affected Syria, Turkey has become inclined to use hard power instruments instead of economic and diplomatic engagement. Furthermore, Turkey enthusiastically supports NATO involvement in the Syria crisis while it had rejected being a combatant force in operations in Afghanistan and Libya. As the statements of the Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian officials show, these governments regard Turkey as an 'opportunity seeker' looking for a military intervention in Syria in order to topple the Assad regime. In addition, it would not be wrong to argue that these governments want to explore the anti-Western sentiments of Middle Eastern public opinion by accusing Turkey of facilitating NATO invasion in the Middle East.

This picture implies that Turkey's Middle East policy has dramatically changed since the 'Arab Spring' reached Syria. Prior to the 'Arab Spring', Turkey was reluctant to concede to foreign military interventions that could impede Turkey's policy of cultivating bilateral and inter-governmental relations based on non-military instruments in the Middle East. Since Turkey did not have sufficient power to prevent such interventions, however, it attempted to set and shape the post-conflict agenda by using international organizations and related platforms. However, since the Syria crisis, Turkey has discarded the Assad regime in favour of supporting the opposition. Furthermore, Turkey urged international organizations like NATO to support its agenda by using instruments of hard power if necessary.

From reluctance to enthusiasm

When the AKP came to power in 2002, the political Islamist background of the party elite raised questions regarding the future of secularism and the Western

orientation of Turkey. Unlike previous political Islamist parties, however, the AKP did not articulate a specific Islam-based identity definition for Turkey. During the first years of the AKP governments, the European Union accession process gained momentum and the democratic reform process continued. In addition to seeking EU membership, Turkey pursued an active agenda in the Middle East as well. Supporters of the AKP's foreign policy argued that Turkey had discovered its multi-dimensionality principle. Accordingly, Turkey started to behave like a rational actor free from any constraining identity commitments.

However, as the AKP consolidated its power in the Turkish political system, this picture has gradually disappeared. With the help of EU reforms and the EU's political support, the Turkish military's influence on the political stage has decreased. However, such a transformation did not ensure a successful EU accession process. Instead, Turkey's ambitious agenda to make progress in the accession process has lost ground and the 2012 EU Progress Report criticized problems related to freedom of expression and the media in Turkey. That is not to say that the AKP has been the only party in the accession process to lose its enthusiasm after eliminating the military's influence over politics. The EU commitment to Turkey's accession also seems to have weakened due to the economic crisis and the exclusionist political attitudes of some member countries such as France and Germany. In sum, the major pillar of the AKP's multi-dimensional foreign policy doctrine has thus lapsed into silence.

On the other hand, Turkey's rising activism was based on a holistic approach that regards the region as a whole. During the first AKP term (2002–07) Turkey pursued a Middle East policy based on an 'equal distance' principle. This meant that Turkey did not exclude any actor in the Middle East and demonstrated that it was in favour of the status quo in the Middle East with its policy towards foreign military interventions threatening stability in the region. In this period, Turkey did not join the combatant forces of foreign interventions, choosing to pursue agenda-setting strategies in order to influence the (post-)intervention process through soft power instruments and collaboration within international regimes. Moreover, Turkey gained the initiative to solve regional conflicts such as the Israel–Syria conflict by the means of its status as a 'moderator state', a status that resulted as from the 'equal distance' policy.

Despite having achieved this status, Turkey has gradually abandoned its holistic approach and activism strategies. It could thus be argued that the second pillar of its multi-dimensional foreign policy has lost ground as well. The first contraction of Turkey's role in the Middle East was the exclusion of Israel from Turkey's Middle East definition, initiated by AKP elites' criticism of the Israel government's behaviour during the Gaza War between Israel and Hamas in December 2008 and furthered as a result of the Davos Summit crisis between Erdoğan and Israeli President Shimon Perez in 2009. The *Mavi Marmara* (flotilla) incident in 2010 exacerbated tensions to the point where the potential for reconciliation between the countries was questioned. The second shrinkage followed the spread of the 'Arab Spring' to Syria, as Turkey's support for Sunni

opposition groups in Syria frustrated Shiite governments such as Iraq and Iran and Shiite populations of the Middle East. Turkey can thus be viewed as having narrowed its Middle East understanding into Sunni groups.

In addition to a reduction in the actors with which it attempts to engage on a productive basis, Turkey has also altered the strategies by which it engages in the region. As demonstrated above, AKP governments had eschewed using hard power as a foreign policy instrument before the 'Arab Spring' threatened the Assad regime in Syria. During that period economic engagement, diplomacy, soft power and international organizations characterized Turkey's Middle East policy. As noted previously, it was not uncommon to assume that Turkey's policy formulation was regarded as a successful example of multi-dimensionality by many scholars. Accordingly, the foreign policy-making elite of the AKP managed to interconnect Turkey's interests in the Middle East with its Western orientation. Although this multi-dimensional foreign policy had been challenged by foreign military interventions in the Middle East, Turkey did not join combatant forces and used international organizations and non-military agendas to affect the post-intervention process.

However, the diffusion of the 'Arab Spring' to Syria altered the AKP's longstanding foreign policy approach. Instead of preserving the status quo, Turkey has turned into a revisionist state that has begun to threaten Middle Eastern governments. While Turkey was reluctant to join the foreign military interventions aimed at Middle Eastern regimes, it has behaved enthusiastically in bringing NATO forces into the Syrian civil conflict catalysed by the 'Arab Spring'. Such transformation ultimately undermines analyses that define Turkey as the kingmaker of the Middle East. Turkey's new foreign policy now seems potentially successful only if NATO countries are convinced to adopt offensive strategies against the Assad regime. The AKP's new Middle East policy thus seems to make Turkey dependent on the mercy of NATO countries for military intervention and the reconstruction of a post-'Arab Spring' Middle East. Given this context, students of Turkish foreign policy are likely to be reading fewer articles defining Turkey as the 'kingmaker' of the Middle East in the future.

Notes on contributors

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