

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

**CONSOLIDATING POWER AT HOME:
TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST UNDER THE JUSTICE AND
DEVELOPMENT PARTY**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACS Association of Caribbean States	OIC Organization of Islamic Countries
AKP Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi	PKK Kurdistan's Workers' Party
D-8 Developing Eight	TAV Tepe Akfen Ventures
EU European Union	TESEV The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation
IMF International Monetary Fund	TOBB The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey
G-20 Group of Twenty	TUSAID Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association
GAP The Southeastern Anatolian Project	IAEA International Atomic and Energy Agency
JDP Justice and Development Party	UN United Nations
MFA Minister of Foreign Affairs	U.S. United States of America
MKO The People's Mujahedin of Iran	WP Welfare Party
MUSAID Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association	WW1/WW2 World War One/ World War Two
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization	
NPT Non-Proliferation Treaty	
NSC National Security Council	
OAS Organization of American States	

ABSTRACT

This Master's Essay examines Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East under the Justice and Development Party (JDP) from the years 2002-2011 and how a new assertiveness in the country's foreign policy is helping it consolidate power at home. The aim of this Essay is to show how an Islamic-oriented party was able to come to and stay in power for the last decade, shifting the domestic and foreign policy of a country that had prided itself in maintaining a political course of westernization and secularization and an approach of neutrality in international affairs for the last eighty years. The objective of the Essay is to prove that due to the rise of new economic classes in the Anatolian plateau supportive of the JDP, the party is conducting an active foreign policy in the Middle East, a neighboring region ridden with political and religious strife, in order to enhance its image as regional power, while gaining economic benefits for its domestic support base.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2002, the political, social and economic landscape in Turkey underwent transformative changes shifting away from its traditional Kemalist course when an Islamic-oriented party, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) was elected to the national parliament. The JDP was headed by young, charismatic politicians that were also devout Muslims. After coming to power the JDP government sought to harmonize the legacy of Kemalism and Turkey's western orientation with the more traditional and Islamic elements of Turkish culture. The course Turkey has taken since the establishment of its republic in October 29, 1923 will be analyzed to better understand this process.

The Turkish Republic rose out of the ashes of the former Ottoman Empire, which collapsed with the end of World War 1. Followed by the so-called "War of Independence," which was led by the "Founding Father" of Turkey Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, a dramatic reform process was initiated toward westernization and secularization. This is wrapped around the ideology known today as Kemalism, named after the country's pragmatic leader, President Ataturk himself. One of the aims of Kemalism was to turn the population into a nation with a consciousness of national belonging. Another objective was to make this new society into a modernized and civilized one (Balci, 2012). In order to realize these aims Ataturk's new ideology sought to abolish the old ways of the empire that did not fall in line with western standards and principles, or had a religious character. The reform process of westernization and secularization were all aimed at creating a new Turkish nation-state with a new sense of Turkish ethnic-nationalism.

Some of the reforms that Ataturk implemented included the abolishment of the Ottoman sultanate in 1922, the adoption of a republican constitution based on the Swiss civil code in 1924

(this had the aim of replacing Islamic laws) (Oran, 2010). Turkey abolished the caliphate¹ in 1924 as well, thus cutting all its ties with the Muslim world. The Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Department of Religious Affairs) was established in order to strictly regulate all expression of Islam and secure secular order within the country (Armstrong, 2012). Another major reform was the radical change in the Turkish language. Written in the Arabic alphabet and with a large amount of Arabic and Persian loan words, the Turkish language was transformed with the incorporation of a new vocabulary that held old Turkish root words, and the alphabet was replaced with the Latin one (Fuller, 2008). These reforms were targeted at replacing the old multiethnic and Islam-orientated values of the Ottoman Empire.

Since coming to power, the JDP has conducted a policy that is trying to have the country play an expanded international role between the west and the east and while simultaneously attempting to synthesize traditional and modern values in its domestic sphere. During the Cold War and well into the 1990s, Turkey had garnered a role as a neutral Western ally. When the JDP came to power in 2002 it reoriented and redirected Turkey's foreign policy agenda, one that it had adhered to for close to 80 years. Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu's Strategic Depth foreign policy doctrine influenced the reshaping of Turkey's position, not only politically but also economically, particularly in the Middle East, where it now sees itself as a critical regional superpower.

It is important to understand that Turkish foreign policy today is complicated and interrelated with its own internal developments. Hence the aim of this research is to try to link Turkey's new foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party, from the years 2002-2011, to internal developments. To better understand this evolution, Turkey's foreign policy particularly in the Middle East will be studied in this research. As a neighboring region with deep historic

¹ The Caliphate was the supreme religious office of the entire Sunni world (Fuller, 2008).

connections, the Middle East is one of the regions where Turkey's new foreign policy engagement can be best analyzed. This new foreign policy is one dimension, albeit a critical one, of the domestic transformations taking place in Turkey. The JDP has been able to balance its foreign policy with its domestic policy because it currently enjoys strong domestic support from the electorate and the new rising middle class, also coined as the "Anatolian bourgeoisie," which is a key component to the market-drive transformation taking place in the country (especially in terms of economic expansion into the countries of the Middle East).

Although it does not constitute a part of this Master's Essay, Turkey's new foreign policy in the region has relevance for the Republic of Armenia, thus the topic of this paper can serve as a compass for any future Armenian foreign policy formulation, and relations or negotiations between the two countries. A country like Armenia, landlocked, blockaded by two of its four neighbors, a party to the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, sharing historic grievances and mistrust with its more powerful neighbor Turkey, with whom it has no diplomatic relations must understand, evaluate and analyse Turkey's new foreign policy assertiveness, also as it pertains to its perceived role as a mediator in the region. Turkey's desire to become an assertive power with an Islamic-oriented party in power can have negative consequences for Armenia.

HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For the purpose of this study the following research questions were formulated:

Research Question 1- Has the Anatolian "bourgeoisie" that has evolved as a result of Turkey's neoliberal economic policy (pursued since the early 1990s) created a support base for the JDP to pursue a more active foreign policy, especially in the Middle East?

Research Question 2- With a more assertive foreign policy since 2002, has Turkey lost the central axis of Western orientation in its foreign relations by shifting it to the Middle East?

Two case studies were taken for this research. The following research question was formulated in regards to those case studies (case study 1: Turkish-Syrian relations; case study 2: Turkish Iranian relations):

Research Question 3- Has Turkey's motivation for improving relations with Middle Eastern countries, Iran and Syria, been motivated due to the traditional isolation by the West of these two countries, resulting in fertile ground where Turkey can best implement its new independent and assertive foreign policy, stemming from its own economic and national interests?

For the purpose of this study the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis- Since coming to power in 2002 the JDP's rising influence in the Middle East is helping it consolidate power at home where it is transforming the Kemalist state, formulating what appears to be an Islamic agenda for the country.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the analysis of secondary data, e.g. scholarly literature, research, journal articles, as well as Internet and media sources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Turkey's new assertive foreign policy in the last decade has become a major topic of debate and discourse in scholarly circles and in the media as well. The existing literature today has intensely assessed different factors that have caused this new shift in Turkish foreign policy. Literature

that examines the factors which have influenced the shift in Turkish foreign policy, were the ones taken into consideration for this research.

The ideology of Kemalism and the newly established Turkish Republic's course toward westernization and secularization after WW1 has been extensively reviewed and studied. In his book, *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, Hans-Lukas Kieser writes, "For the Kemalist Elite, 'entering into Western civilization' was another name for gaining 'strength' in order to engage the 'struggle for survival' with other nations, considered as hostile (or potentially hostile) 'species' ...The distinction between Nation and People that Kemalism introduced allowed it to organize and manage the consequence of this complex historical operation of remaining oneself and becoming the other" (2006: 31). Baskin Oran in his book *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006: Fact and Analyses with Documents* notes that, "... Turkey felt very isolated after the war [WW2] and found the international environment extremely threatening. In these circumstances it was only natural for Turkey's foreign policy decisions to be fully aligned with the West. Turkey had never been able to join any alliance since the Ottoman Empire with the ease with which it joined NATO, with hardly a single dissenting domestic voice" (2010: 294).

Current literature on Turkey, however, mainly centers on the JDP. This new party's actions and policies have led to much contentious debate: how it came to power, how it stayed in power and what it is doing with that power. In this regard Yavuz and Walker have concentrated many of their works on this topic. Hakan Yavuz in his book, *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, explains: "What has made the party's success more striking is that, despite being Turkey's youngest and least known pro-Islamist party, and having been established only 14 months before the election, on its first try the JDP captured 67 % of seats in the Turkish

Parliament, more than the critical majority required to amend the constitution” (2008: 107). The major role of the JDP is also covered by Joshua Walker who in his article *The Interlinking of Turkey's Domestic and Foreign Policy in the AKP's 3rd Term*, states: “In the wake of the AKP’s victory with close to half of the popular vote, and the resignation of Turkey’s top military commanders six weeks later, there is no longer any doubt who has exclusive control over foreign policy in a way unprecedented for civilian leaders and a single party in modern Turkish history” (2011: 1)

The central theme in any discourse about the JDP has centered around its new foreign policy vision, which shifted the country's traditional approach sparking much controversy and suspicion. The architect of the JDP's new foreign policy is MFA Ahmed Davutoglu. In 2001, he wrote his foreign policy doctrine called *Strategik Derinlik, Turkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic Depth, Turkey’s International Position), which until today has not been translated into the English language. Despite its tremendous importance and far-ranging implications, the "strategic depth" doctrine has received little scholarly attention. Aras and Walker are one of the few that have extensively studied this doctrine. Bulent Aras in his policy brief *Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy* states, “One essential component of Davutoglu’s vision is to make negative images and prejudices, particularly those pertaining to the Middle East, a matter of the past. This shift has enabled Turkey to completely emancipate foreign policy from the chains of the domestic considerations” (Aras, 2009: 4). Joshua Walker in his 2007 piece *Learning Strategic Depth: Implications of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Doctrine* elaborates on the fact that “The implications of the 'strategic depth' doctrine are manifest in all aspects of Turkey's national security and foreign policy decisions, while its mere mention can cause counter-balancing weights within Turkey's own domestic structures” (2007: 1).

It is noteworthy that the JDP has been implementing this new foreign policy doctrine with some success specifically in the Middle East, a region ridden with decades-long conflicts and where Turkey, until the end of the Cold War, tried to avoid. The International Crisis Group (ICG) has conducted a major research on this top, as has Fuller. The International Crisis Group's Europe Report No. 203 *Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints* stresses the fact that, “Turkey’s new engagement with the Middle East and the charismatic appeal of its leaders among Middle Eastern peoples have made the country a player that the region and the world need to take into account” (2010: 29). Graham Fuller in his book, *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* explains, “With the emergence of a consensus in Turkey for a foreign policy based on 'no enemies' in the region, JDP has vigorously moved toward reviving and broadening Ankara’s long-atrophied relations with the Middle East and Muslim world. This is evident in its active willingness to serve as an intermediary in crises between the U.S and Middle Eastern countries, to broaden bilateral relations with regional Muslim and non-Muslim neighbors, and to assume leadership of the OIC” (2008: 69).

Current literature on Turkey has outlined many reasons for Turkey’s new turn in foreign policy, however none have really linked it to domestic reasons. In this regard, Carol Migdalovitz in his article, *AKP’s Domestically-Driven Foreign Policy* makes a noteworthy point: “Since the AKP took office in 2002, it has shrewdly used an assertive foreign policy to enhance Turkey’s status as an actor and power on the world stage in ways that have enabled the party to consolidate power at home. A strong affinity for “Muslim” causes, evocation of muscular nationalist pride, and active mercantilism are the dominant foreign policy themes that have benefited AKP’s domestic power drive the most. These themes often overlap and at times displace significant foreign policy concerns that some believe also ought to be in Turkey’s interest. They also

reinforce a domestic agenda that has sought to normalize university matriculation of religious school students, allow women to wear the turban in more public venues, and sidetracked the party's own democratization initiative for Kurdish rights. Despite Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's boasts, his achievements in the international arena have been mixed, minimal, or none although they have greatly benefited his party's popularity at home" (2011: 38).

Current literature seems to bypass or not fully appreciate the inter-linkages of Turkey's foreign and domestic policies. The overriding majority of sources admit and or assert that there is the appearance of a shift in Turkey's foreign policy, but there's no real concensus on the subject. Turkish specialists, in their turn, have been rather obtuse in their own writings about their country's foreign policy shift and any real or perceived linkages with internal factors.

THE KEMALIST STATE AND THE RISE OF THE ILAMISTS

The republic of Turkey, created in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, undertook extensive and sweeping reforms to secularize and westernize the country and create a national sense of belonging to the Turkish Republic. The first president Kemal Ataturk, the architect of modern Turkey, and his followers created a radical atmosphere of change in the country.

By the 1920s and 1930s Kemalism, Ataturk's ideology of state building, became a more structured ideology encompassing six principles (Six Arrows that were later integrated into the Constitution in 1937). They are secularism, nationalism, republicanism, revolutionarism, etatism and populism (Kieser, 2006).

Within the context of this Six Arrows, Turkey's pro-Western stance became its main policy motivator not only for domestic issues, but foreign affairs as well. What gave this Western drive precedence were the Soviet territorial demands on Turkey's eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan in 1945, which forced Turkey to seek defense support from the West. Hence Turkey joined NATO in 1952 (Kirisci, 1997). This Western allegiance and its military character became a focal point for Turkish foreign and domestic policy (Lauer, 2010).

In the meantime, as the Republic of Turkey transformed Kemalism into a sanctified national orderly system and Mustafa Kemal into a sanctified "founding father," the more the need to protect this "Kemalist state" was deemed necessary by the ruling elite. The military took up the role of protectorate, who exercised its influence through the National Security Council (NSC) (Kirisci, 1997). Over the years, Turkey's military became the symbol of the secular order and the guardian of the Turkish state. Hence, the four (1961, 1971, 1980, and 1997) coup d'états that the country experienced during the 20th century were, in part, military responses to "religious invasion" into political and social life (Armstrong, 2012).

Although Ataturk's domestic policies were also aimed at cutting the country from its Ottoman past, in regards to its foreign policy, there are many similarities between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. According to Oran both have based their existence on two basic principles: 1) to be aware of the balance of power and use it for survival and 2) unless directly threatened, to stay away with wars involving others (Oran, 2010).

If Turkey's Western orientation manifested itself culturally before World War Two, then after 1945 its Western orientation was expressed in political terms (Aydin, 1999). However, while still leaning on the West on foreign policy issues, Ataturk established the firm principle of neutrality, irredentism, and noninterference, which dominated its foreign policy throughout the Cold War (despite a couple of incidents, such as the Cyprus invasion of 1974) (Fuller, 2008).

Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East, which is the focal point of this Master's essay, was basically absent from the Turkish foreign policy spectrum. Fuller brings a couple of reasons as to why this is. One is that the Arab world was no longer part of the Turkish state, Turkey's priorities revolved around building new ties with its former European "enemies," and Ankara's thinking was dominated with Kemalist disparagement of Arabs and especially Islamic culture. However, Ankara did renounce territorial claim on non-Turkish parts of the Middle East, with the exception of certain border areas of Syria and Iraq (Fuller, 2008).

With the emergence of the Cold War Turkey and the Arab world were left standing on opposite sides of the East-West divide. This led to an unsuccessful era in Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East. This doesn't mean, however, that the Middle East was completely excluded from the foreign policy agenda of Kemalist Turkey.

By the late 1960s, Ankara had come to realize the costs of its single-track commitment to Western policies and as it was trying to come out of its state of isolation, the Ankara government

felt obligated to gradually change its foreign policy and give it new dynamism. By this period the immediate threat of the Soviet Union was decreasing and Ankara started gradually improving its ties with the Middle East. This latter attempt was to gain economic benefits from the region and gain international support for its foreign goals (Fuller, 2008).

With major problems in Turkey's economic development, including triple-digit inflation, and industrial production at half capacity, the 1973 oil price hikes gave Turkey an even greater reason to develop close relations with its oil-rich Middle Eastern neighbors. This new Middle Eastern market laid the foundations for Turkey's first major steps in external trade ('Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,' 2010). With this, Turkey's foreign policy developed an economic component for the first time. It was during this time as well that the Islam-oriented National Salvation Party led by Necmettin Erbakan, appeared when it built a coalition government in 1974 with the Republican People's Party (Fuller, 2008).

The 1980s brought one of Turkey's bloodiest coups and even more significant changes in its economic and foreign policy. Then Prime Minister Turgut Ozal conducted a more assertive policy toward the Middle East. It was during these years that the Soviet Union collapsed and the end of the Cold War came in effect. This led to the growth of Turkey's economic relations with the Middle East. (Kirisici, 1997)

Prime Minister Ozal later became president and until his death in 1993, he left a remarkable mark on Turkey's history. He transformed Turkey from an import-substitute country to one with a strategic export-oriented program (Oran, 2010). This opened the country to foreign investment, and helped Turkish entrepreneurship to develop. In short, he helped expand Turkey's foreign economic relations which in turn, according to Fuller, paved the way to a broadening of

diplomatic relations throughout the region (Fuller, 2008), thus making Turkey's economic policy the driving force of its foreign policy.

However, after Ozal's death in 1993 Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East saw a setback once again to its neutral, conservative nature. It was during this time as well that the military's security concerns became aggravated. Besides the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of PKK attacks, what primarily worried the military establishment within the country was the rise to power of the Islamic Refah Partisi (Welfare Party), headed by Necmettin Erbakan² (Kieser, 2006).

At the time, the Welfare Party was Turkey's only overtly pro-Islamic party. It represented the National Outlook Movement,³ which won 158 out of 500 parliamentary seats in the 1995 general elections, becoming the only openly religious party to hold such a high share of votes and shocking the Kemalist establishment. The Welfare Party then became the leading coalition partner when the elected center-right parties failed to form a stable coalition government. Necmettin Erbakan was named the first Islamic prime minister in the history of the Turkish Republic (Yavuz, 2006).

The Welfare Party adopted a foreign policy that was a major departure from Turkey's conventional policies (Yavuz, 2006). Statements made by the party's leaders reflected many of the classical themes of mainstream Islamists in other parts of the world. The party adopted a stance against the "imperial character" of the Christian West, denounced the EU as a "Christian club," opposed Turkish plans to seek EU membership, and urged a Turkish pullout from NATO.

² The NSC considered political Islam a bigger threat than the PKK (Kieser, 2006).

³ The major political Islamist movement in Turkey until the late 1990s was the Milli Gorus (National Outlook) movement initiated by Necmettin Erbakan. Despite their Islamist rhetoric, Erbakan and his followers generally avoided direct criticism of secularism. They founded the National Order Party in 1970 and the National Salvation Party in 1972. Both parties were accused of being antiseccular and disbanded following the military coup d'états of 1971 and 1980. In 1983 Erbakan founded the Welfare Party (Yavuz, 2006).

Erbakan also sought closer relationships with other Islamist leaders across the Muslim world (Fuller, 2008). Soon after coming to power, he visited different Muslim countries such as Iran and Libya and launched the establishment of a group called the D-8 (the Developing 8), composed of Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey (Kirisci, 1997).

Naturally, Erbakan's policies were not viewed with enthusiasm by Turkey's secular and military elite, as well as by the West. In attempting to establish an Islamic common market⁴ while in opposition, Erbakan had threatened to end the military agreement with Israel, especially since he held suspicion of the role of Jewry in influencing international politics and strongly criticized Israel's regional policies (Fuller, 2008). However internal politics forced him to not only keep the military agreement with Israel (established in the 1960s) but also to ratify in January 1997, the free trade treaty with Israel signed in March 1996 (Kirisci, 1997).

The opposition the Welfare Party encountered domestically came mainly from the military, which has held an approach characterized by pragmatism, conservatism and a pro-Western stance (Kirisci, 1997). And it was the military establishment that prevented the major shift in Turkish foreign policy that the Erbakan government was trying to realize.

The military started a process of mobilization against this spread of political Islam. During the National Security Council (NSC) meeting of 28 February 1997 the Council directed the Erbakan government to prevent the rise of the "Islamization" of the country and to strengthen its secular character. The Welfare Party was obligated to adopt these policies that marginalized its hard-core constituency and the political role of Islam they were trying to create, thus contradicting its own policies and triggering unfavorable reactions from many of its supporters. Three months later, the government resigned because of this. The NSC's recommendations started a period often

⁴ Erbakan had termed this market an "Islamic NATO" (Kirisci, 1997).

called the “February 28 process,” also known as the “post-modern coup” or “soft military” coup (Yavuz, 2006). A year later in 1998, the Constitutional Court pronounced the closing-down of the Welfare Party and put a five-year ban on its key policy makers taking an active part in politics. This dissolution gave rise to a new Islamist party, the Virtue Party, whose political life was not long either; it was closed down in June 2001 (Kieser, 2006).

The 1997 post-modern coup led to a situation where all other socio-economic or democratic demands were “postponed” as the only way to overcome the dangers that were threatening the country (Kurdish politicians, Islamist, or even liberal intellectuals) (Kieser, 2006).

Meanwhile other events also shook the Turkish political establishment. After the dismantlement of Turkey’s first pro-Islamic government a new coalition government was formed consisting of Turkey’s secular Democratic Left Party and the nationalist-conservative Nationalist Action Party. This coalition government adopted a comprehensive International Monetary Fund-led structural adjustment program in order to stabilize the country’s economy. However, due to a lack of willingness and coherence on 19 February 2001 the country ended up in the deepest economic crisis in the republic’s history. This crisis affected the economic standing of almost all Turkish citizens, triggering a process of political realignment (Yavuz, 2006).

When there was a call for the IMF to provide a massive new standby emergency aid package after the 2001 crisis it became evident that the Turkish state was dependent on the West and unable to solve its own problems. It was during this time as well that the Helsinki summit in 1999 accepted Turkey as a candidate for accession to the European Union. This in turn laid down certain conditions essential for attaining full membership (Oran, 2010).

Soon after the crisis general elections were held in Turkey in November 2002. Only the Republican People’s Party (Ataturk’s established political party who considers itself as the

protector of secularism) managed to return to parliament from all the other major political parties. In their stead, a new party came to power, virtually without any political opposition. This new party was the Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (the Justice and Development Party, JDP) (Yavuz, 2006).

In 2001, a group of young and more liberal Islamists from the Welfare Party, such as the former mayor of Istanbul Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other former WP members, such as Abdullah Gul, broke away from Erbakan and formed a new party: the Justice and Development Party (Fuller, 2008). Along with the JDP other members of Erbakan's Islamist bloc formed the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party) that has had limited influence.

By the time the JDP came to power, Turkey was dominated by a failed party system (all other major parties were discredited after the 2001 economic crisis) and a need for fostering economic stability at any cost. With 34% of the popular vote the JDP set a precedent in Turkish politics by winning two more consecutive parliamentary elections afterwards, with 47% of the vote in 2007 and in 2011, thus becoming a predominant force in Turkey (Walker, 2011). What is most striking in this situation is that the overall atmosphere that prevailed in Turkey during the turn of the century led to the victory of a less-known, young party that was established 14 months before the election and on its first try captured 67% of seats in the Turkish parliament, forming the first majority government in decades. It was able to achieve this without even holding its first party congress or offering a detailed political agenda (Yavuz, 2006).

What led to the continuing popularity of the JDP government was its clear-cut, disciplined, and highly motivated policies within the domestic and foreign sector; since coming to power, Turkey's economy has grown. In the last decade Turkey has become a country with a \$1.1 trillion economy (Cagaptay, 2012). Despite being a right-wing party, the JDP has provided near-

universal health services, free distribution of basic goods such as flour, coal, and sugar, free schoolbooks for children, and affordable housing (Yavuz, 2006).

Besides its reforms within the economic and social spheres, the JDP government also launched an aggressive reform package with the aim of “fostering” the development of the democratization process in Turkey. The JDP used the EU’s “Copenhagen Criteria” as a blueprint. By the time the negotiation process for Turkey's EU accession in Luxemburg started on 4 October 2005, a record number of 553 laws were proposed by the JDP government and adopted by the JDP-dominated parliament. These reforms incorporated a broad spectrum of initiatives revolving around human rights, professional administration, etc. (Yavuz, 2006). The most progress Turkey has ever made in its EU accession process took place during the JDP government (Armstrong, 2012).

However, the major accomplishment these reforms gave to the JDP was the shift of power from generals, who were more concerned with perceived threats to secularism than with the country’s overall development, to a civilian institution with whom the rising, more self-consciously Muslim elite rooted in Anatolia could connect with (“Turkey and the Middle East: Looking East and South,” 2009). Through the EU reforms, the JDP dismantled the power of the Turkish military by stripping the army of its majority in the NSC and uncovering the military’s plot of a coup to overthrow the government in the Balyoz, or “Sledgehammer” case (Armstrong, 2012). In due course Turkey’s top military commanders handed in their resignations (Walker, 2011). This EU negotiation process and the implementation of the Copenhagen reforms has also helped the JDP keep the Kemalist establishment at bay, while it continues to carry out policies centered around greater economic liberalization. President Abdullah Gul has considered these civilian-initiated reforms, the first in Turkey’s history, as “a silent revolution” (Yavuz, 2006).

The case of the JDP is quite interesting as its policies and reforms are all a part of the gradual political, social and economic democratization of the country. This process started during the time of Turgut Ozal and his economic initiatives in the 1980s. His policies increased foreign investment, foreign trade, and entrepreneurial opportunity. His neo-liberal economic reforms led to the formation of a new business class that originated from Anatolia (Fuller, 2008). During the last years of the 20th century and the by the time the JDP came to power, large-scale internal migrations had taken place, literacy was growing within the population and the state was already disengaging itself from the economic sector through privatization (Yavuz, 2006). With the presence of religious revivalism, a growing Islamic professional and intellectual class was also evolving. Different social actors such as the so-called Turkey's local (Anatolian) bourgeoisie, MUSIAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessman's Association, a consciously Muslim businessmen's association), and new urban dwellers created by internal immigration appeared in consequence to this. These are the social actors that form the support base of the JDP (Fuller, 2008).

According to Fuller, "while the new, traditionally minded Anatolian business class honors Ataturk as a reformer and as savior of the nation from Western imperialism, it retains a deep identification with the Ottoman past and is uncomfortable with Kemalism's inherent disparagement of the country's Ottoman and Islamic past." (Fuller, 2008: 49-50) This newly developed business elite was the reason for the JDP's shift from its long-term economic and Western-leaning geopolitical objectives to its own regional neighborhood, especially towards the south (Walker, 2011). For the realization of the latter objective the JDP broadened Turkey's export market, especially in the Middle East. This topic will be discussed in the next chapter.

Interestingly, despite the fact that this support base is Muslim-oriented, this new Anatolian bourgeoisie seems to support EU-oriented democratic norms more than the secularists. Yavuz claims that this is because they understand that this is the only way for them to come to power (2006). The reason secularist factions of society might not be enthusiastic for EU reforms might be the paradoxical fact that these democratic reforms would weaken the political influence of the military, the guardian of Kemalism. It seems this is the main reason the JDP government and its followers were more adamant on implementing EU reforms, thus deconstructing the security-based exclusive nature of the Kemalist structure.

Analyzing the JDP is quite complex, since it seems to hold a vague ideological stance. The fact that the JDP came to power with no clear official ideology might be explained by the political and economic situation that prevailed at that time. However, trying to explain why the JDP continued to gain popularity with its conflicting policies and statements makes this all the more a conundrum. It appears that the JDP is trying to reconcile the forces of Islam and liberal democracy, without making it too obvious. While advocating liberal economic policies and democratic values, the JDP can't conceal its National Outlook Movement past, suggesting its members' predisposition to extremist ideas. Erdogan and his followers are trying to break away from this. Presenting his party as something new to aspire to Erdogan had once stated:

My political view has always been in a state of constant evolution. Naturally, I have been profoundly influenced by those that have preceded me... In some Western newspapers and publications, my party is described as "an Islamic party" or as "Muslim democrat." These characterizations are not correct. This is not because we are not Muslim or democrat, but because we believe the two need to be considered in two different contexts.

(Yavuz, 2006: 118)

The game the JDP is trying to play is giving Islamic politics a new expression, while at the same time proving it's not an antisystemic Islamic party. Despite the fact that the founders of the JDP had matured politically under Erbakan and worked closely with him in earlier periods, their wish to erase any connections to the Welfare Party's ideological legacy is very important for them. By learning from the WP's past mistakes of a radical stance, the JDP has represented itself, by far, as the most moderate, professional and successful of the Islamist parties in Turkey. The JDP renounced an orientation toward political Islam and finally presented itself with an official ideology that they coined conservative democracy (Fuller, 2008).

This so-called "conservative democracy" appears to be more of a go-between in the polarized ideological space of Turkey. The components of this ideology are still in the making, thus providing the party the opportunity to bring Islamic values to the political sphere, however in unprecedented ways. Yavuz argues that because of its ambiguities and vague structure, conservative democracy serves different significant purposes: it defines the party's identity in an unthreatening way to the international community and assures its hard-core constituency that Islam continues to play a major role in the party's policies, as it forms the foundation of the common values that the party seeks to represent (2006). This approach to its official ideology illustrates that the JDP is using conservative democracy to define the party for others and is not a guiding tool for itself.

Due to its vague ideology and many other factors, one of the main questions discussed around the JDP is whether it is an Islamist or pro-Islamic political party. It's an accepted fact that the JDP has either tried or actually implemented certain reforms that leave the impression that the party is an Islamist one. When it first came to power, the JDP increased value added taxes on alcoholic beverages. In January 2011, a new law came into force that severely restricted the use

of alcohol products in advertising; it also increased the age of alcohol consumption from 18 to 24 at public gatherings (Zaman, 2011). In June 2003, the parliamentary budget commission planned to place 15,000 new posts at the Directorate of Muslim Affairs. This caused much opposition from the secular factions, which accused the government of infiltrating state bureaucracy with Islamic fundamentalists (Yavuz, 2011). The JDP has also pursued several other policy reforms, which have led to much criticism and discontent. The party has and continues to support lifting the ban on headscarves for women in public places, it has supported having the broader academic system integrate the imam-hatip (theological) schools, it has worked closely on Islamic banking, taken the risk of publicly considering criminalizing adultery, and has shown support for elements of historic Ottoman symbolism (Fuller, 2008).

Another reason the JDP has been coined Islamist and can't seem to prove its positive stance towards secularism is that the founders of the JDP and their followers were all former members of the WP. A large portion of the JDP leadership comes directly out of the National Outlook Movement and has, in the past, been closely associated with Erbakan and his Welfare Party. The JDP members are also generally observant Muslims in their daily lives. Erdogan himself was sentenced to ten months in prison in 1998 for "spreading hatred based on religious cleavages" when he publicly recited the lines of a poem: "the mosque are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets, and the faithful our soldiers..." Although Erdogan was later released, he remained barred from running for office (Yavuz, 2006). That changed, however, when the JDP changed the country's constitution. This is why radical secularists claim that the JDP is being dishonest when describing itself merely as a democratic conservative party. They believe that the JDP is in reality pursuing a deeper agenda of Islamicizing Turkey by imposing Sharia law (Fuller, 2008).

The secularist fears can be understood to some extent. Despite the fact that it has officially distanced itself from political Islam, the JDP has declared secularism as the only prerequisite for democracy and freedom in Turkey (Fuller, 2008). However, Fuller states in his book “The New Turkish Republic” that the JDP insists that secularism should be defined as “the state’s impartiality towards every form of religious belief and philosophical conviction” and “the state, rather than the individual, is restricted by this” (Fuller, 2008: 50). With this it becomes evident that the JDP’s stance runs counter to Kemalism’s position on secularism, which calls for the subordination of religion to the state. In this regard, the JDP has promoted a softer form of secularism; one that allows for more religious expression in government, politics and education (Cagaptay, 2012).

The question of JDP being an Islamist party or not has been the topic for much literature when analyzing Turkey today. Questions such as: “what are the criteria then as to what makes a party an Islamist one?” “Is the commitment of the members of the JDP to religious values in their personal life enough to label the party Islamic?” “When does a movement or a party become or cease to be Islamic?” “Even if the administration of the party denies any connection with political Islam, can we still consider the party Islamic?” “Is it enough to call them Islamist if their members are openly Muslim?” have all been interpreted differently by different specialists. Fuller claims that being considered an Islamist is a broad term that incorporates activists who believe that the Koran and the life of the Prophet offer important principles on Islamic governance and society. Within this context he considers JDP to be a form of an Islamist party; a moderate Islamist party that is also exploring the very concept of what it means to combine religious values with political life (Fuller, 2008). Gursel in his article, “Who Really Wants a ‘Muslim Democracy’” claims that the JDP is reformed, and thus considers it “neo-Islamist.” He

explains that a neo-Islamist party is one which doesn't propose the establishment of Sharia law, but instead follows a strategy of transforming Turkish society into a more conservative one in religious terms (Gursel, 2011). Yavuz argues that if an Islamic political movement no longer articulates arguments on the basis of Islamic values, it is no longer Islamic. A movement is Islamic to the extent it is making political claims on religious grounds. He contends that since the JDP doesn't articulate policies based on Islamic identity but makes claims on the basis of public reasoning, then it is not an Islamic party but a party of service, giving it a more administrative format (2006).

It is possible to say that the JDP is not of an Islamist character because when it was established it took an anti-WP stance, which was a publicly Islamist and anti-Western party. The JDP still considers the West and EU membership as vital for the country's survival. The JDP itself has argued that while agreeing that religion is personal, "[religion] can be incorporated into the public and political spheres without compromising the secular state system" (Fuller, 2008: 52). However, the fact that JDP leaders stress the urgent need to establish good relations with other Muslim countries in order to help their "Muslim brother" from isolation and to stop radicalizing them has been viewed as motives of an Islamist party. It seems evident that the JDP leadership is in a search for more effective policies to enhance the political role of Islam and the right of observant Muslims in the Turkish public sphere, through implementing different reforms and changing the constitution in a way to make it impossible for the military and other elites surrounding the secular elements of society from grabbing power from the party.

For our analysis we will consider the JDP to be party with Islamic orientation that is adeptly simulating to be secular, but "conservative," and under this conservatism it is attempting to

conduct an Islamic agenda, albeit a moderate one so far. It seems that the JDP has “learned” to articulate religious interests and claims through secular idioms of politics (Yavuz, 2006).

All in all, Turkey’s domestic political transformation and its democratization under the JDP have played an important role not only in keeping the party in power for a decade already but also in the expansion of its foreign policy. Turkey’s foreign policy has been the center of much debate and analysis since the JDP came to power, receiving much more attention than the JDP’s domestic policies themselves.

Turkey’s more assertive foreign policy has been more noticed in the Middle East than in other geo-political region. Despite its neutral stance and avoidance of involving itself in the Middle East, Turkey had since the 1970s been slowly starting a process of moving toward involvement in the region, at least economically. Economic and strategic relations with the Muslim world would soon become a central part of Turkish foreign policy especially after the end of the Cold War. This reached its height after the JDP came to power. With the strength of the Turkish economy and the revival of Islamic feeling, along with the sluggishness of talks to join the EU, Turkey has gained ever more momentum to be back in the Middle East, which it had ignored for much of the 20th century (“Turkey and the Middle East: Looking East and South,” 2009).

With this new activism Turkey has, therefore, shifted away from Europe. This is a process that seems to have started before the JDP came to power with the economic and political policies of Turgut Ozal during the end of the Cold War. Ozal had embraced the philosophy of neo-Ottomanism.⁵ Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoglu’s concept of “Strategic Depth,” which guides JDP’s foreign policy and will be discussed in the next chapter, can be traced back to Ozal’s neo-Ottomanism. This concept of “Strategic Depth” is predicated on historical and

⁵ A term coined by the columnist Cengiz Candar, advocating an active and diversified foreign policy based on Ottoman heritage (Sandrin, 2009).

geographical depth and considers Turkey as a potential leader in the Muslim and Turkic world (Sandrin, 2009).

THE STRATEGIC DEPTH IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: THE DAVUTOGLU DOCTRINE

The evolution of Turkish foreign policy has seen many changes since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. To understand this evolution, Turkey's geostrategic location must be considered, which has granted it a strategic advantage. Located in both Asia and Europe, Turkey borders the Balkans, the Caucuses and the Middle East. Across the water from its coast of the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas Turkey has 25 coastal neighbors. The seas and rivers passing through Turkey also give it a strategic positioning. All traffic into and out of the Black Sea goes through the Turkish Straits. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers begin in Anatolia and flow to neighboring countries (Iraq and Syria), thus giving Turkey control over the freshwater of Syria and Iraq. Besides its geographic location, in cultural terms Turkic languages and culture spread throughout southeastern Europe all the way to northwestern China. During the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul was also the seat of the Caliphate and ruled Jerusalem, Sarajevo, Mecca, Cairo, Belgrade, Damascus and Baghdad for centuries.

This geographic positioning afforded the Turkish state the opportunity to conduct an assertive expansionist policy during the years of the Ottoman Empire. However when the Ottoman power entered in a phase of decline starting from mid-18th century, the main foreign policy objective was the preservation of the status quo by military and diplomatic means (Aydin, 1999).

When the new Turkish Republic was established in 1923 it had lost not only its power but also its desire for territorial conquest. With a new international configuration after WW1, Ataturk was

more concerned with the independence and stability of the new Turkish Republic and thus conducted a neutral foreign policy under his motto, "Peace at home, peace in the world." (Fuller, 2008)

By the time the JDP came to power at the turn of the century, Turkey was a country where the military was running the show, the country was an adamant NATO ally (1952), a station for the West and a country dissociated with its Ottoman past. However, the JDP brought new dynamism to Turkey economically, socially and soon enough to its foreign policy as well. Turkey's foreign policy took on a more assertive character and mainly shifted its concentration towards the Middle East (Kalaycioglu, 2011).

Coming to power in 2002 the JDP adopted a foreign policy that has been trying to balance good relations with Middle Eastern countries while proceeding with EU accession. According to Yavuz, this in between stance creates a fertile ground for eliminating the identity crisis of Turkish foreign and domestic policy (2006). However, since religion is part of the worldview of the JDP and affects the way it governs, it has received much criticism in this regard. This new activism has been linked to the rise of Islamic political identity in Turkey. Many claim that the JDP has "Islamified" Turkish foreign policy (Lauer, 2010). This debate on whether there is a specifically Muslim or even Islamist orientation in Turkey's new improved relations with the Middle East, a region that is predominantly Muslim, will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Despite this criticism directed toward the JDP, the party has nonetheless been able to enforce such policies that have upgraded Turkey's position within the International community. Turkey is a member of the G20, has a total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of around 915 billion U.S. dollars, has the 15th largest economy in the world and it is the 6th largest economy in Europe, Turkish troops are training the Afghan National Army, it has brought 750 Palestinian police

officers for training in Turkey, and along with Spain, has helped establish the Alliance of Civilizations, a UN-supported forum for improving relations between the Muslim world and the West (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010; Mercan, 2010).

However, it would be wrong to attribute this new activism as exclusively a JDP government initiative (Onis, 2011). Elements of a more active and assertive foreign policy approach were introduced in the post-Cold War era starting with President Turgut Ozal in the 1990s. With his doctrine, which has been dubbed as “neo-Ottomanism,”⁶ Ozal started a more active foreign policy in the Middle East by initiating economic relations with the Muslim world. The foreign minister of the coalition government between 1999 and 2002, Ismail Cem, has also been accredited for providing a foreground for a more assertive multi-dimensional foreign policy. It was during his tenure that relations with Greece normalized and closer relations with Syria were initiated. However, as a member of the coalition government that preceded the JDP he believed in a pro-active foreign policy, yet with a firm Western commitment (Ormeçi, 2011). While Ozal and Cem laid the groundwork for this new proactive policy, it was the JDP who gave it a new life and moved it forward.

This recent activism of Turkish foreign policy, under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the ruling JDP cannot be discussed and understood without reference to Ahmet Davutoğlu. Having developed his strategic vision about Turkey in his academic capacity, Davutoğlu, in 2001 published his book *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position* (Strategik Derinlik, Turkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu). By joining the ranks of the JDP in 2002, Davutoğlu was given the opportunity to put his theory into practice. From 2002-2009 he served as Prime Minister Erdogan's chief foreign policy advisor, and by 2009 he ascended the post of

⁶ A term coined by the columnist Cengiz Candar, advocating an active and diversified foreign policy based on Ottoman heritage (Sandrin, 2009).

Foreign Minister. Davutoglu has become perhaps one of the most important architects of contemporary Turkish foreign policy (Walker, 2010).

This was due largely to the fact that the JDP did not have any foreign policy experience when it came to power in 2002). After being appointed chief foreign policy advisor to Erdogan, Davutoglu was given free reign to shape Turkey's foreign policy according to his theory. Gradually *Strategic Depth* has become a leading force in, and providing the guiding tools for, Turkey's active and assertive new foreign policy.

However, the problem concerning Davutoglu's foreign policy doctrine is that it remains a kind of enigma for the West and Western scholars and diplomats. His book *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position* has no English translation. There is English literature revolving around the analysis of certain points of the book, thus providing information on this unique journey Turkey is now taking in terms of its foreign policy. In the English language journal *Insight Turkey*, (Volume 10, No 1, 2008) Davutoglu provides insight into what directions this new Turkish foreign policy is taking and where it is headed.

Aras' article *Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy* covers Davutoglu's *Strategic Depth* comprehensively. He states that according to Davutoğlu, Turkey's domestic transformation, specifically the consolidation of political and economic stability in the country, has given the country the opportunity to attain such a foreign policy vision (2009).

In his article *Turkish Foreign Policy Vision* Davutoglu states that today Turkey's new position has both an ideological and a geographical basis. Turkey's unique geographic location and diverse regional composition lends it control over an area of influence in its immediate environs. In this regard, Turkey controls the Bosphorus and is heir to the Ottoman Empire. Since it's the heir to Ottoman Empire, which incorporated the Muslim world within its borders and was the

center of the Caliphate, Turkey now also has the potential of becoming a “Muslim superpower.” Thus, Turkey is a central country that cannot define itself in a defensive manner with its disposition. "It should be seen neither as a bridge country which only connects two points, nor a frontier country, nor indeed as an ordinary country, which sits at the edge of the Muslim world or the West” (Davutoglu, 2008: 78).

In order to become this central Muslim superpower in the region Walker explains that *Strategic Depth* seeks to counterbalance Turkey’s dependency on the West by courting multiple alliances, thereby maintaining the balance of power in its region. By keeping such a balance it will be able to maintain optimal independence and leverage on the global and regional stage (Walker, 2010).

Grigoriadis discusses a unique element of Davutoglu’s *Strategic Depth* in that he rejects Turkey as a bridge between Islam and the West (as some like to consider the JDP-led government to be), since he considers Turkey to be not only a Middle Eastern, but also a Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea country. This positioning allows Turkey to simultaneously exercise influence in all these regions and thus claim a global strategic role. Diminishing phobic syndromes and establishing friendly relations with all its neighbors will help Turkey to become a regional leader and play a global strategic role (Grigoriadis, 2010).

Fuller brings the important point that even though the doctrine calls for an active engagement within the neighboring region of Turkey and the need to build strong economic linkages with all regional states regardless of former Cold War mentalities or hostile American policies towards these neighbors, Davutoglu still maintains the necessity of remaining sensitive to American and European interests in these regions (Fuller, 2008).

In *Strategic Depth*, Davutoglu mentions five tools through which Turkey should realize its foreign policy. In his view, the first tool Turkey needs to develop is a new policy of integrating

foreign policy issues into one policy framework. According to Davutoglu, Turkey has multiple regional identities and thus can incorporate a number of issues into the same picture within its foreign policy. In this regard Davutoglu, emphasizes that Turkey's integrated foreign policy approach is exemplified by the fact that Turkey is an active member of the G-20, maintains a high commitment to the EU membership process and at the same time is deepening its relations with the Middle East (Aras, 2009)

The second tool Davutoğlu puts forth to realize his foreign policy vision is the adoption of rhythmic diplomacy, which will support a pro-active foreign policy line. In this regard Davutoğlu has guided foreign policy into a high degree of involvement with the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), which resulted in the election of Turkish Professor Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu to the position of general secretary by democratic vote for the first time in the history of the OIC. Turkey has also acquired observer status in the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and the Organization of the American States (OAS). According to Aras, Davutoglu has targeted this proactive diplomacy toward achieving “zero-problems” with Turkey's neighbors, a policy line that has received the most attention inside and outside of Turkey (2009).

The third mechanism is presence on the ground, in particular during times of crisis. Davutoglu argues that Turkey needs to be on the ground whether it is in the European Union, the Middle East or the Caucasus with a Turkish perspective. This mechanism has been played out during recent conflicts such as the Russia-Georgia crisis and the Gaza Crisis. For example, Erdoğan visited four influential Arab countries soon after the Israeli offensive in Gaza and Davutoglu himself pursued shuttle diplomacy between Damascus and Cairo during the crisis (Aras, 2009).

The fourth mechanism is Davutoglu's all-inclusive, equidistance policy. According to this approach Turkish policy should aim to include all related actors, forming a broad coalition to solve problems and develop initiatives. In this regard, Turkish policymakers keep an equal distance from all actors and avoid taking part in any regional alliances or groupings. According to Davutoglu, Turkey's all-inclusive policy and equidistance policy can help satisfy the concerns of regional actors and assure them the practicality of Turkish policies (Aras, 2009).

The fifth tool Davutoglu mentions in his book is total performance in foreign policy, that is NGOs, business communities and other civil organizations should take part in the new foreign policy vision. As a result, business organizations, civil society, intellectuals, think-tanks, and other actors now provide input into the foreign policymaking process. The new role of these institutions is part of this idea of total performance (Aras, 2009).

Davutoglu has stressed the idea that since Turkey should take on the role as a central country its new position should be one that provides security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighboring regions. He links Turkey's own security and stability to the opportunity of taking on a more active, constructive role in order to provide order, stability and security in its environs (Davutoglu, 2008).

In his article *Turkish Foreign Policy Vision*, Davutoglu outlines five other principles of Turkey's foreign policymaking process. They are:

- 1) *Balance between security and democracy.* If there is no balance between security and democracy in a country, it cannot establish an area of influence in its environs. Since 2002, Turkey has maintained that its most important soft power is its democracy.
- 2) *A "zero problem policy with Turkey's neighbors."* This has been implemented for the past ten years, in some cases successfully (Georgia, Syria) and not in some (Armenia,

Cyprus, Lebanon, and Bulgaria). This new policy seeks to use the soft power of trade, along with historical links, to project stability beyond Turkey's frontiers.

- 3) *Developing relations with neighboring regions and beyond.* According to Davutoglu, Turkey's regional impact extends to the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- 4) *Adherence to a multi-dimensional foreign policy.* Davutoglu views Turkey's relations with other global actors to be complementary. In this regard, Turkey's strategic relations with the United States via NATO, its membership process with the EU, its good neighborhood policy with Russia, and its synchronization policy in Eurasia are integral parts of a consistent policy that serve to complete each other.
- 5) *Rhythmic diplomacy.* Davutoglu highlights the success of this principle by the international meetings and organizations Turkey has hosted since 2003. Such examples are the NATO Summit and the OIC Summit and receiving an invitation to the Arab League twice, both at the level of foreign minister and prime minister (Davutoglu, 2008).

In regards to the Middle East, Davutoglu mentions four main principles on which Turkey needs to rely on in order to further establish its position in this region: 1) security for everyone, which means security for the entire region. 2) Priority must be given to dialogue as a means of solving crises. 3) Economic interdependence. 4) Cultural coexistence and plurality (Davutoglu, 2008).

Naturally Davutoglu's foreign policy doctrine has received much criticism. The main criticism is the neo-Ottomanist dimension of his vision, which places Turkish foreign policy activity mostly in former Ottoman territories. Aras argues that by making boundaries, de facto, meaningless while respecting national sovereignty, Davutoglu has created a geopolitical disposition that exhibits a tendency of returning to the former Ottoman Empire's backyard (Aras, 2009).

Davutoglu has himself said, "... whenever there is a crisis in the Balkans, the victims of those crises, like Bosnians, Albanians and Turks of Bulgaria, they look to Istanbul. We are paying the bill of our history" (Lauer, 2010). İbrahim Kalın argues: "Turkey's post-modernity seems to be embedded in its Ottoman past" (Aras, 2009). Davutoglu rejects the label "neo-Ottoman." He insists this labeling is an attempt by his opponents to tarnish his foreign policy with a colonialism undertone (Lauer, 2010). However, his statements don't help in eradicating this label.

In an interview given to the Anadolu News Agency in 2009 Davutoglu said, "From Bosnia to Abkhazia, from Chechnya to Syria and Iraq, there are many peoples who have very great expectations of Turkey... Turkey's geography and history has loaded Turkey with special responsibilities." In an interview given to CNN Türk in the same year he stated, "We have no sovereignty over anyone. We want to contribute to the foundation of a lasting order in our region. If by Pax Ottomana you mean such an order ... it wouldn't be wrong" ("Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 2010: 21).

Today the JDP has given much of its attention to the Middle East. It appears that the JDP government is content to follow through with Davutoglu's four principles that to need to be applied in its relations to the Middle East. When analyzing Turkey's active foreign policy in the region, it becomes evident that creating economic interdependence has been a priority. This priority has been conceived by the JDP to establish security in the region. Today, Turkey's economy produces the equivalent of half the entire output of the Middle East and North Africa, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Israel. Davutoglu has singled out economic interdependence as the most important tool allowing Turkey "to gain depth" in its neighborhood, while pointing to the prominent role of private sector firms in driving the country's foreign policy and strategic vision ("Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 2010).

Naturally, since Turkey's foreign policy has always had a Western orientation, drastically changing it or deviating from it appears to be almost next to impossible, especially when we take into account the economic, military and social integration that has taken place up till now. Nonetheless, the JDP will try to weaken this orientation. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey's EU membership is desirable, and is put into context with Turkey's multiple strategic alternatives. This means that EU membership is not considered Turkey's unique strategic orientation, as it has in the past (Grigoriadis, 2010).

Even though Turkey is considered westernized for different reasons (secular state, policy of laicism), it is not considered Western by the West. This double standard has created a situation where the Turkish public and the new ruling elite feel that Western orientation and EU accession are no longer a priority. Turkish officials have found it unacceptable that Turkey is treated as a European country only when it comes to ensuring Europe's security and defense but not the other way around (Kirisci, 1997). Many circles, including JDP followers consider Turkey's EU accession as an obstacle for Turkey to conduct an independent foreign policy and to become a worldwide power. There has also been a decline in the percentage of the Turkish population's support to become a EU member. According to a Eurobarometer poll, support for EU accession plummeted from 71 percent in 2004 to 47 percent in 2010 (Kieser, 2006). Davutoglu himself admitted in 2007 that, "... The integration process slowed down. Overall, the relations with the EU did not progress to an extent that we would like to see, but the relationship has continued, let alone being suspended, as many feared" (Davutoglu, 2008).

While Turkey's EU accession process has stalled, its activism in the Middle East has progressed with amazing speed. Prime Minister Erdoğan and other JDP leaders started visiting Middle Eastern states with dizzying frequency after coming to power and visits to Brussels sharply

declined, especially after 2005 when Erdogan stayed away from the EU capital for four years (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010).

Erdogan’s led JDP government has indeed conducted an active foreign policy in the Middle East within the context of Davutoglu’s “Strategic Depth” doctrine. Within the principle of rhythmic diplomacy Turkey has signed a special agreement with Arab countries during a meeting of Iraq’s neighbors held in Istanbul on November 2, 2007. This agreement includes plans for institutionalizing the relations among Iraq’s neighbors, and constituting a Turkish-Arab forum. Turkey has also hosted diplomatic meetings for other neighboring countries, like the Solana-Larijani meeting that took place to discuss the Iranian nuclear issue, or the Musharraf-Karzay meeting to discuss question revolving the Pakistan-Afghanistan issue (Davutoglu, 2008).

Turkey has also been developing a more assertive relationship with its neighboring regions such as the Balkans (the Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina crises) and the Caucasus (close relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia) (Davutoglu, 2008).

The main principle that has been the most controversial and most debated, however, is the “zero-problems with neighbors” policy that, despite some successes, is considered not to have achieved its full potential. One of the most striking examples of the success of the zero-problems principle is its relations with Syria. From a hostile relationship since the founding of the Turkish Republic, the two countries by 2011 had developed a progressing relationship. The economies of the two countries have developed thanks to a series of free trade agreement (Davutoglu, 2008). The unique relationship between Turkey and Syria will be discussed in the next chapter.

While Turkey’s foreign policy has fallen into line, to a certain extent, with Davutoglu’s principles, its policy toward the Middle East, in particular, has gained an Islamic dimension as well. Davutoglu has stated that Turkish foreign policy remains outside the Shia-Sunni division,

and this is corroborated by Erdogan's visits to Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and its evolving relations with Iran (Davutoglu, 2008). However, the rhetoric of Turkish officials proves its Islamic orientation toward its foreign policy in general. Turkey was seen as taking the side of Muslims against non-Muslims when championing Azerbaijani Turks against Armenians, Bosniaks against Serbs, Palestinians against Israelis (this stance has also led to the JDP's much discussed anti-Israel position) ("Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 2010). In this regard Prime Minister Erdogan's rhetoric, in particular, is worthy of attention. He has praised Turkey's rapprochement with Syria by saying "my brothers ... the river has found its riverbed" ("Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 2010). However, his most famous Islamic rhetoric was when he made comments about Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir when he was indicted by the International Criminal Court for atrocities in Darfur: "Let me say this very openly and clearly. It is absolutely impossible for someone who is part of our civilization, someone who has given himself over to our religion of Islam, to commit genocide" ("Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 2010).

The Middle East, other than an Islamic factor and a possible alternative to its Western orientation, is most importantly an arena for vast economic development for Turkey. It was the economic factor that Turkey, in the 1970s started getting involved in the Middle East. For example, in 1977, Ankara negotiated the opening of a pipeline from Iraq to Turkey's Mediterranean coast that ultimately brought Turkey revenues of up to \$1.2 billion dollars a year (Fuller, 2008). In the early 1980s Prime Minister Turgut Ozal helped mobilize Turkish business interests in the region and started attracting Arab capital to Turkey. With the launch of the

Southeastern Anatolian Project (GAP, Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi)⁷ Ozal tried to improve relations with Syria by promising in 1987 a minimum water flow of 500 cubic meters per second from the Euphrates (Kirisici, 1997). However, this and the “peace pipeline” initiative never materialized.

Turkish trade has seen drastic changes within the region. If in 1999 the European Union accounted for over 56 percent of Turkish trade; in 2011, it was just 41 percent. Meanwhile the Islamic countries’ share of Turkish trade increased from 12 percent in 1999 to 20 percent in 2011(Cagaptay, 2012). From 1996 to 2009 Turkey’s total exports grew four-fold. Exports to the 57 countries of the OIC, however, grew seven-fold, reaching 28 per cent of total exports in 2009. (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010)

What must be noted is that the Turkish business elite have played a major role in all of this. Big business associations such as TUSAID (Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association), TOBB (Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey) have always influenced different spheres of Turkish politics. They would prepare reports on issues such as education and democracy in Turkey, the Kurdish question, and current foreign policy developments. After the rise of the JDP, MUSAID (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association, who are identified with the pro-Islamist camp) has also taken an active role in this (Oran, 2010).

The business aspect of its relations with the Middle East has also pushed Turkey to conduct a policy of integration as well with the region. Turkey has conducted a policy of trading privileges, such as its free-trade pacts with Egypt, Israel, Morocco and Tunisia. In 2009, teams of Turkish ministers traveled to Baghdad and Damascus to sign a package of 48 cooperation deals with Iraq

⁷ GAP is an integrated multipurpose dam project that was designed to produce 27 billion kilowatt hours of power per year and bring 1.7 million hectares under irrigation. However, there were fears that eventually Gap was to diminish the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers (Oran, 2010).

and 40 with Syria. These packages cover everything from tourism to counter-terrorism and joint military exercises (“Turkey and the Middle East: Looking East and South,” 2009).

Due to these agreements Turkish films, television series, music and products have made their way to Middle Eastern markets. At the same time Al Jazeera is opening a Turkish news channel, just like CNN did 12 years ago. Railway lines between Turkey, Syria and Iraq have been reopened after a \$70 million dollar investment (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010). The Turkish construction firm TAV has constructed an airport terminal for Egypt’s capital, Cairo, and is building others in Libya, Qatar, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Turks have scooped up hundreds of infrastructure contracts in Iraqi Kurdistan, and invested in shopping malls, hotels and even schools (“Turkey and the Middle East: Looking East and South,” 2009)

Thus, the JDP government has used its new foreign policy doctrine to assert itself more actively within the spectrum of international relations. Progress in domestic developments and reaching the main sectors of society has led the JDP to gain a new sense of self-confidence. With this new self-confidence it has been able to pursue a foreign policy with new dynamism and appeal. A question arises here as to why the JDP government has chosen the Middle East as the primary region to assert itself. Most claim it’s because of the JDP’s Islamic character and wanting to warm up to its Muslim brothers (Zalorski, 2011). Others claim it’s for pure economic reasons, since the Middle East provides a fresh new market for the Turkish business class (Lauer, 2010 and Kirisci, 1997). Others have claimed that by losing its importance to the West it is trying to assert itself as a regional power in a geostrategic location where it has former ties, in order to gain its strategic importance back for the West (Grigoriadis, 2010). Some also claim that Turkey today is more modernized and internationalized and feels strong and secure enough to take up

new Middle East challenges, without deviating from the West (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010).

It is evident that the Justice and Development party has an Islamic agenda; not a radical one, but rhetorically, at least, defines itself and its policies within religious grounds. In this sense, religion, in Turkey’s activism in the Middle East is playing a factor. This is proven by Turkey’s role in the Muslim world (in this case the Middle East), which has always been directly affected by the changing place of Islam in Turkey and at the same time by Muslim world perception of Turkish attitudes toward it (Fuller, 2008). The Middle East, being a region of religious brotherhood, is also the one place that would most probably accept Turkey as a senior partner if the latter plays its cards right.

However, this doesn’t mean that economic motivators can be excluded to explain Turkey’s new activism in the Middle East. On the contrary, it appears that economic relations have been the guiding force for relation with the Arab world. Due to the fact that Turkey has trade deficits with the European Union and the United States (together accounted for 46 percent of Turkey’s global trade in 2008) (Katcher, 2011), the Middle East might seem attractive since in this region Turkey actually holds a trade surplus. In 2009, Turkey had an \$8 billion surplus with the Middle East (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010). The JDP government seems to have the opinion that this trade surplus can help alleviate the country’s chronic trade deficits.

In any case, religious and economic factors may be motives for this new assertiveness and self-confidence the JDP is exercising, but in the larger picture this policy is conducted for domestic consumption. Zalerski mentions that the Turkish think tank TESEV conducted a survey according to which 65 percent of those surveyed in Turkey back the JDP’s foreign policy;

around 80 percent said that they believe Turkey can be a model (cultural, political, and economic) for the countries of the Middle East (2011).

However, despite certain appealing factors, the Middle East in reality is a region ridden with conflict and strife. Throughout the Arab Spring Davutoglu's *Strategic Depth* principles came under fire. By trying to develop relations with neighbors and neighboring regions, Turkey had established friendly economic relations with countries whose leadership would be brought not only into question but would be thrown out of power. Turkey embraced the changes in Tunisia and Egypt, however it misjudged Libya by initially rejecting sanctions and even opposing NATO's involvement. Only near the end of the conflict did Ankara change its tactics and supported the protestors, calling for Qaddafi to step down (Ozel, 2011). Today, Syria has led Turkey to confront the same situation again, since Turkey is heavily invested in Syria in political and especially economic terms (Ibid.). On the other hand, Iran has also presented a difficult situation for Turkey. Turkey has tried following an independent policy towards Iran to gain its trust, and by doing so has refused to side with Western pressure aiming to stop Iran's uranium enrichment program (Grigoriadis, 2010). While trying to put itself in the centre of a compromise solution in the Iran case and paralyzed between its ties with an autocratic regime and establishing credibility has created a unique and sticky situation for Turkey.

For the purpose of this research, Syria and Iran were chosen for case studies to explore and try to understand Turkey's new foreign policy, its' strategic depth and how it has secured popularity back home.

CASE STUDY 1

TURKISH-SYRIAN RELATIONS

Syrian-Turkish relations have been riddled with different challenges from ideological to economic, territorial to ethnic conflicts. In this case study, we will examine how Turkish-Syrian relations improved and flourished by the turn of the 20th century and how the difficult situation today has inflicted Turkey with the troubling task of confronting its new foreign policy and relations with the region.

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic and throughout the Cold War, Turkish-Syrian relations were negatively affected by different factors: historic antagonism and distrust, Turkey's Southeast Anatolian Project (GAP), Syria's support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Syrian irredentist claims over the Hatay province (Syrian territory annexed to Turkey in 1939 by France, Syria's colonial master at the time), Israel and reports of close Greek-Syrian defense cooperation.⁸

After World War I, with Turkey orientating itself toward the West, Damascus, a former Ottoman city, was conceived as the center of Arab nationalism thus creating psychological tension between Syria and Turkey (Fuller, 2008). It was not until the Cold War stimulated more hostility, when the two countries found themselves in opposite ideological camps, with Turkey solidly in the NATO camp and Syria aligned with the Soviet Union. By the time the Soviet Union fell and the Cold War was brought to an end, Turkish-Syrian relations shifted to seeking instruments to pressure one another in regards to such issues as the Kurds, water resources and Israel.

By the end of the 1990s the Kurdish issue would become the changing factor in Turkish-Syrian relations. After the 1981 coup d'état in Turkey the leadership of the PKK escaped into Syria

⁸ This was accompanied by Syria granting Greece landing right for its military planes during a time when Turkish-Greek relations were also tense (Kirisci, 1997).

where it was given state support. Syria provided the PKK training grounds in the Biqa valley situated in Lebanon and gave Ocalan refuge in Damascus (Fuller, 2008). It was during this time that in 1987 President Ozal tried to solve the water problem existing between the two countries by offering an agreement in which Ankara would guarantee a fixed flow of Euphrates water to Syria, dubbed the Economic Cooperation Protocol. In return, Turkey expected Syria to stop its support for the PKK. However, Syria did not support this endeavor and the protocol never materialized into a treaty and relations deteriorated (Gresh, 1998).

Frustration with Damascus increased during the 1990s when PKK guerrilla and terrorist operations inside Turkey reached serious levels. Finally, in 1998 Ankara issued a blunt ultimatum to Damascus telling it to cease support for the PKK and to expel Ocalan or face a Turkish military invasion. Turkey positioned a thousand Turkish troops on the Syrian border (Fuller, 2008). Sensing it didn't have many alternatives, Syria's then president Hafez al-Assad yielded. An agreement was signed on October 20, 1998, in the Turkish city of Adana. With the Adana Agreement, Syria for the first time acknowledged the PKK as a terrorist organization. It also agreed to expel PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from Syria, uproot the PKK camps in the country, stop supplying the PKK with weapons and logistical and financial support, and finally, extend cooperation with Turkey against the PKK (Aykan, 1999). The Adana Agreement launched a new and important bilateral relationship, which set the stage for the extraordinary blooming of trade and political relations over the next decade between Turkey and Syria.

With its victory in the 2002 national elections the Justice and Development Party implemented A. Davutoglu's foreign policy doctrine of "Strategic Depth." Syria was part of the "zero problems with neighbors" policy. Turkish-Syrian relations were foreseen to be built on strong political and economic ties (Davutoglu, 2008). Turkey was willing to improve ties with Syria

despite the autocratic nature of the regime in order to reinforce its regional position. This would become a thorny issue that would later haunt Turkey.

Fuller points out that Davutoglu considered the hostile nature of Turkish-Syrian relations in the past as a costly luxury for two states that share such a long common border. Davutoglu considered issues of water, agriculture, trade and communications as the focal point of the development of this relationship. Davutoglu also emphasized the importance of Turkey's role as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli issue, which is of vital concern to Damascus (Fuller, 2008).

Both sides reached a willingness to reduce and resolve many long-standing bilateral frictions. There is a sense that both Turkey and Syria need each other in order to establish themselves in the region, either as a regional power in the case of Turkey or coming out of an isolated state in the case of Syria. During President Bashar al-Assad's visit to Turkey in 2004 he stated that Syria could be a bridge for Turkey to the Arab world, and that Turkey was a doorway into Europe for Syria (Walker, 2007).

This mutual understanding and dependency was one of the main pillars of Turkish-Syrian relations. Turkey gained the sympathy of the Syrian public, who saw improved relations with Turkey, as a way to come out of isolation and as a counterbalance to Iran's presence in the region. The secular government of Syria, an ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran, would appear to have more cultural affinity with the political elite of Turkey, rather than Iran's Islamist rulers (The Economist, 2009).

One of the crystalizing moments of Syrian-Turkish relations was, in the context of interdependence, the Syrian-Israeli proximity talks brokered by Turkey. A process that started in 2004 when Turkish NGOs facilitated contacts between Palestinian and Israelis, notably in Gaza, Turkey further shifted its role in the Israeli conflict when it conducted five rounds of indirect

talks held between Syria and Israel in 2008. The goal of these talks was to pave the way for direct negotiations, and ultimately, a peace deal and the return of Syria's Golan Heights (occupied by Israel since 1967) (International Crisis Group, 2010). However, a few days after the last proximity talks, Israel initiated its Operation Cast Lead against Gaza in 2008. Erdogan, was angered and felt betrayed. During the World Economic Forum in Davos, after Israeli President Peres passionately defended Israel's 22-day offensive against Hamas, Erdogan stormed off stage (Daniszewski and Moore, 2009). The process of proximity talks were soon after suspended.

Despite this negative development, Syria and Turkey enjoyed excellent political, trade and security relations in the 2000s. Syria recognized the province of Hatay as part of Turkey through different agreements signed in 2004, even though indirectly.⁹ Since then both countries have lifted visa requirements, held joint military trainings, and signed technical cooperation agreements as well. The Sixth Turkish-Syrian Protocol was signed, which was a packet of a significant number of bilateral agreements, covering the economic sphere, duty-free trade, tourism and educational exchange (Balci, 2012; Walker, 2007).

In 2005 a free-trade zone agreement was signed between the two countries (Fuller, 2008) and by March 2010 they had signed 51 protocols on trade, development and cultural exchanges, shelving differences over sharing the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Already by 2009 the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries had reached \$1.7 billion making up less than one percent of Turkey's total trade. Exports to Syria nearly quadrupled and rose to almost 30 percent in 2009 as well ("Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 2010).

⁹ During the drafting of the texts of the agreements, Syria did not question the wording describing the two countries' borders (Oran, 2010).

Besides economic developments, Iraq also served to further deepen their relations after the 2003 U.S. invasion and the possible threat that a Kurdish autonomous state may emerge in Northern Iraq. The two countries created a “common plan” for the territorial integrity of a united Iraq (Walker, 2007).

However, while Syrian-Turkish relations were flourishing, Washington made clear that it disapproved of these developments as they stood in the way of America’s attempt to isolate Syria. Turkey acted coolly in this regard and portrayed its ability to conduct an influential foreign policy independent of Western pressures. Hence, Turkish-Syrian relations had become an example of Turkey’s strategic depth in the Middle East, a prevalent opinion among scholars and regional specialists.

However, the March 2011 protests in Syria, which developed into a nationwide uprising, left Turkey in a conundrum as to how to approach the crisis. The international community is also divided on Syria. It appears no single country seems able or willing take part or lead an intervention to end the Assad regime. The problem with Syria is that it doesn’t have strategic importance to the West since it is not a major oil or gas producer and doesn’t have any major transit routes (Turan, 2011).

In a situation where Western countries are too preoccupied with their economic hardship and Syria’s neighbors are unwilling or unable to lead an intervention, Turkey is the only country to do so (especially because of its location and its historical, diplomatic, and economic ties to Syria) (Balci, 2012). In contrast to the other Arab Spring countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya) Syria is the one country where Turkey has major interests besides economic ties. It shares a 600-mile long border where a large amount of refugees are passing especially since there are no more visa requirements for Syrians (Turan, 2011).

However, Turkey has stated that it is not ready to act unilaterally, despite calls for it to do so. Besides its good relations with the Assad regime, a possible unsuccessful operation would threaten JDP's image of Turkey as a model for the Arab world (Balci, 2012).

An even greater threat for Turkey is the issue of the Kurdish population in both countries. Syria's Kurdish population (approximately one million) is situated in the northeastern part of the country, a majority of whom are descendants or refugees from Turkey in the 1920s when Kurds escaped over the border from Turkish oppression (Fuller, 2008). According to Balci, Ankara fears that the Kurds of Syria might soon enjoy the same freedoms and autonomy the Kurds in post-Saddam Iraq did, thus spurring Turkey's Kurds to intensify their claims for autonomy as well (Balci, 2012).

When the Syrian conflict broke out, Turkey advocated coalition-building and engagement for a possible peaceful solution. Foreign Minister Davutoglu went to Damascus armed with a 14 point plan to deliver to Bashar al-Assad (Mabley, 2012). The Turks proposed reforms that would create an inclusive and ultimately democratic governance structure. However, soon after Assad proved that his regime wasn't willing to implement the Turkish reforms and considered crushing the opposition (or "terrorists," as the regime considers them), in order to return to the status quo (Cebeci and Ustun, 2012).

By this time Turkey came under attack for not criticizing the regime and that its engagement policy had now turned into a burden, preventing it from unequivocally supporting the uprising (Kirisici, 1997). However, once the death toll started to rise and losing all hope that the Assad regime would stop the violent crackdown on protesters, Turkey finally by mid-2011 increased its critical rhetoric, and in August Erdogan openly called for Assad's resignation and considered the opposition as the legitimate representative of the people (Kardas, 2012). Soon after, Turkey

started assisting the Syrian opposition on its soil. Turkish nongovernmental organizations,¹⁰ such as the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief and Mazlumder, took charge of mediation and cooperation efforts with Syrian refugees and opposition groups. Syrian opposition leaders started organizing international meetings in Antalya and Istanbul (Balci, 2012). Syrian opposition groups such as the Syrian Liberation Army,¹¹ Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Council are all now operating inside Turkey (Balci, 2012; Cebeci and Ustun, 2012).

In November, the Arab League imposed sanctions on Syria and suspended its seat in the council, two things that were never done before by the League. On December 26, the League sent an observer mission of 165 delegates to the country, which however left little if no impact on the Assad regime (Balci, 2012). The UN Security Council on its part tried to implement sanctions against Syria which were, however, vetoed by Syrian allies Russia and China. These latter countries called for a Syrian-led transition process (Balci, 2012).

Turkey however was not very enthusiastic about the sanctions since the crisis was already having its negative effects on Turkish businesses with close links to Syria. However at the end it complied (Cebeci and Ustun, 2012). By the end of 2011 several proposals were put on the table. Turkey suggested creating a buffer zone on Syrian territory. A second suggestion was from France who proposed creating protected humanitarian corridors to help get supplies into Syria. The Syrian opposition on its part has suggested implementing no-fly zones over Syria to protect opposition groups involved in the resistance (Balci, 2012).

¹⁰ According to Balci, these nongovernmental organizations are actually organized by the government (Balci, 2012).

¹¹ Little is known about this force. Turkish officials are very discreet about the topic and do not allow observers and media to contact the troops deployed in the forbidden border zone (Balci, 2012).

By the end of 2011 Turkey remained vocally critical of outside military intervention and still advocated creating a buffer zone. It has been preoccupied with humanitarian assistance, international isolation of the regime empowering the regime.

The Syrian revolt and Turkey's slow reaction has shown the flaws of its "Strategic Depth." It appears Turkey wasn't able to materialize its claims as a broker for regional stability through Syria, since its "diplomatic intervention" was ignored by the Assad regime. Ozel notes that halfway through the conflict Turkey decided to fundamentally change its stance "from a status-quo-oriented pragmatism to a principle- and value-oriented stance in Turkish foreign policy" (2011: 3).

As a final conclusion for this case study we can state that by engaging with a country that has been isolated by the West has helped Turkey create an image of a credible partner and influence within Syria. However, the Syrian revolt not only put Turkey's zero-problems policy under scrutiny, but also left the Turkish state caught between deepening ties with autocratic regimes in the Arab world (in this case Syria) and establishing credibility in the eyes of Arab populations.

Turkey's warm relations with the Syrian regime in the past have been accredited to Assad's secular regime. This may be why Turkey refrained from outright criticism of the Assad government and initially attempted to engage them during the beginning of the conflict. It's zero-problems strategy was also a factor (Walker, 2011; "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," 2010).

However, an important element - the religious factor - has not been covered extensively by literature in regards to Turkey's position on the Syrian revolt. Once Turkey took an anti-Assad stance and began supporting the opposition, the leading forces of the opposition such as the Liberation Army, Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Council established themselves

within Turkish territory along with Syrian refugees. These organizations have been linked with the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria, with whom Turkey itself has established relations with (Cebeci and Ustun, 2012). The Syrian opposition represents the Muslim Sunni population in Syria resentful to what they consider an Alawi domination of the State apparatus and security forces, and Turkey's eventual siding with the opposition can be seen as stemming from religious factors as well.

In the bigger picture Turkey's involvement in the Syrian situation underscores that economic relations, trade and diplomacy aren't the only factors that can support an ambitious strategic policy of becoming a regional player. The promotion of democracy, human rights, rule of law and other principles are also necessary elements to portray yourself as a power in the region (Walker, 2011).

CASE STUDY 2

TURKISH-IRANIAN RELATIONS

Relations between Iran and Turkey extend back to the formation of the Ottoman Empire in the 13th century. In this case study we will examine how Turkish-Iranian relations improved and flourished by the turn of the century and how the high tensions between Iran and the U.S. today have inflicted Turkey with the troubling task of successfully implementing its new foreign policy. From the 16th century their relationship resembled a religious cold war, which saw much ideological rivalry and a struggle over territory in Anatolia and Mesopotamia (Fuller, 2008). By the 18th century the Treaty of Erzurum was signed between Shia Persia and Sunni Ottoman Empire (Calabrese, 1998). This was followed by a century of peace. Despite a few cultural and ideological tensions and mutual distrust, relations between these two empires were one of vigilant coexistence. Even during the Cold War they didn't find themselves on opposite

ideological camps as the Arabs and Turks did. Reza Shah, the leader of Iran from 1925 to 1941,¹² even took Kemal Atatürk's ideology of westernization and secularization as a model for his country (Fuller, 2008).

Until 1979, when the Islamic revolution in Iran took place, Turkish-Iranian relations were based on friendly approaches toward each other. They both considered themselves to be pro-Western and status quo countries (Calabrese, 1998). After the 1979 revolution, which established theocratic rule in Iran, religious tensions were aroused between Iran and Turkey while relations between the U.S. and Iran deteriorated. Thus, Turkish-Iranian relations lost their former underpinning. Turkish-Iranian relations were further complicated when the Iran-Iraq war broke out (Iraq had become one of Turkey's leading energy suppliers) (Calabrese, 1998).

However, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Turkish-Iranian relations moved to a new geopolitical terrain. During the 1990s different factors affected Turkish-Iranian relations. The ideological tension, in regards to religious disagreements (Iranian theocracy versus Turkish secularism), remained prevalent during this time. One of the factors causing tension between Iran and Turkey was the geopolitical rivalry that was created as an aftermath to the end of the Cold War. Central Asia and the Caucasus had emerged as a theater for Turkish-Iranian cooperation and competition in geopolitical as well as in economic terms. According to Calabrese, Turkey and Iran, however, soon started to avoid seeking an "exclusive presence or predominant influence vis-à-vis each other" (Calabrese, 1998: 93). Calabrese claims that the two countries seemed to recognize the dominance of Russian interest in the former-Soviet regions (1998).

¹² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/500867/Reza-Shah-Pahlavi>, retrieved 3 June, 2012

The most serious question, however that prevailed between Turkey and Iran during the 1990s was the Kurdish issue and the PKK. Despite a joint security protocol signed in October 1993 requiring that neither country would allow a terrorist organization to exist on its soil (Calabrese, 1998), Turkish authorities frequently accused Iran of giving the PKK logistical support and encouraging PKK attacks inside Turkey, something that Iran rejected. Turkey also accused Iran of supporting certain assassinations inside Turkey and also supporting the Kurdish Islamist Movement Hizballah.¹³ In return, Iranian authorities accused Turkey of harboring opponents of the Khomeini regime, especially members of the Mujaheddin-e Khalq (MKO) (Calabrese, 1998; Fuller, 2008; Kirisci, 1997).

However, this mutual distrust and blame game shifted at the turn of the century. After the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, Iran began to cooperate militarily with Turkey in the struggle against the PKK. According to Oran, Iran's PKK policies were a reaction to U.S. policies in the region and its support for Turkey's struggle against Kurdish terrorism. Oran also considers Iran's PKK policies during the 1990s to be a tool to somehow reduce Ankara's influence in the region (Oran, 2010).

By 1996, steps for better relations were already being taken (due to the persistence of Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the Islamic-orientated Welfare Party that was in power in the mid-1990s). In this year, Turkey and Iran signed two major economic agreements: a long-term \$23 billion natural gas supply contract and gas pipeline construction scheme and a pledge to increase bilateral merchandise trade to an annual value of \$2.5 billion (Calabrese, 1998).

¹³ Unrelated to Hizballah in Lebanon (Kirischi, 1997)

The occupation of Iraq by the U.S. military also brought these two countries closer together. Both Turkey and Iran were concerned about the territorial integrity of Iraq and took a common stand against the possibility of a new state in northern Iraq (Oran, 2010).

Turkey itself has taken measures to improve ties with Iran. When the Justice and Development party came to power in 2002 it worked seriously in this direction, despite the Turkish military's suspicious stance on Iran. However, this never stood in the way of maintaining a balanced good relation with Iran (Fuller, 2008). Turkey and Iran have always been able to set aside religious and ideological differences in favor of overcoming shared bilateral concerns and economic dependencies. Even during the Khomeini years (1979-1989) Turkey was recognized as an economic partner and intermediary. When Mohammad Khatami was reelected as president in 2001, Turkish-Iranian relations further flourished. With the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 the conciliatory approach toward Ankara continued with more fervor (Oran, 2010).

Iran has also been part of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy. In this context, Iran's importance for Turkey lies in its energy supply. According to Davutoglu, "Turkey needs Iranian energy as a natural extension of its national interests. Therefore, Turkey's energy agreements with Iran cannot be dependent upon its relationships with other countries" (Davutoglu, 2008: 91). Iran's nuclear ambitions are also viewed as an integral part of Turkey's foreign policy vision for the Middle East (Davutoglu, 2008). In any case, Iran's nuclear program is connected to Turkish national security, thus, as Grigoriadis points out, giving Turkey an opportunity to conduct a proactive foreign policy (Grigoriadis, 2010).

This is demonstrated by Turkey's approach to Iran, which differs from that of the West. Turkish leaders congratulated Ahmadinejad on his reelection in 2009, which had sparked much controversy and protests within the country. Prime Minister Erdogan himself stated about

Ahmandinejad that, “there is no doubt that he is our friend... we have had no difficulty at all” (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010: 16).

One of the major components of improved Turkish-Iranian relations has been the perception that Iran provides Turkey to be a corridor. In his article, “Turkish Foreign Policy and Iran,” Murat Mercan, member of parliament, chair of the Turkish Grand National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee, states that regional cooperation in Eurasia is a vital component of Turkey's foreign policy vision and hence Iran's role here can be underscored. By assisting Turkey in creating energy and transportation corridors connecting Europe and Asia, Iran “holds a prominent place among our Eurasian partners” (Mercan, 2012).

Iran, naturally also benefits from warm ties with Turkey. Due to sanctions, it's war with Iraq and the regime's inability to implement coherent policies, Iran is in dire need for technology and investments. Thereby, where Iran can play a role for Turkey's energy requirements and it's ability to provide transportation routes to bring in oil from Central Asia, Turkey plays a vital role for Iran for it's trade with the West (Kirisci, 1997).

The economic component that is one of the main driving forces in relations between Iran and Turkey is important to understand for this research. Turkey's dependency on external energy sources has led the country to look for alternatives.¹⁴ Iran has been considered one of those alternatives, hence the abovementioned \$23 billion agreement signed between the two countries to build a natural gas pipeline (Kirisci, 1997). In December 2001, a gas pipeline was put into operation. While Turkish procurement of gas shifted the trade balance to benefit Iran due to high customs, Iran compensated for this by lowering duties on all Turkish exports. This was an example of how the two countries were able to resolve any potential conflicts (Oran, 2010).

¹⁴ Turkey purchases most of its natural gas from Russia and smaller quantities, in liquefied form, is imported from Algeria and Australia (Kirisci, 1997).

Due to these gas policies, Iranian gas has become the biggest import for Turkey from the Middle East. In 2007 both countries agreed on a memorandum of understanding surrounding a strategic alliance in the field of energy. Their envisioned energy project would be drilling new oil and gas wells as well transporting energy through Greece to Europe via the existing pipelines situated in Turkey¹⁵ (Fuller, 2008).

Since the JDP came to power the trade volume between Iran and Turkey has greatly increased reaching the \$ 10 billion mark in 2008¹⁶ (Ulgen, 2010). However in 2009 this number decreased to \$5.5 billion due to the global economic crisis (Mercan, 2012). Transportation relations have also flourished. During the JDP years rail passenger services were resumed (Oran, 2010). Besides the development of railway transportation, Iran has also served as an important route for Turkey toward Central Asia. In 2007 alone 92,000 Turkish trucks passed through Iran to the Turkic region of Central Asia (Ulgen, 2010). These economic developments have led to the booming of tourism between the two countries; primarily Iranian tourists visiting Turkey. Iranians are the largest number of tourists who visit Turkey from the Middle East and annual of 1 million tourists visit the country annually (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010).

However, there have been bumps along the road. Several well-advanced deals have collapsed for example. One was the construction of the Imam Khomeini Airport in Iran by the Turkish firm TAV. After the completion of the airport the Iranian parliament denied the company the right to operate the facility, despite the right being provided to the company in the signed contract. The parliament also denied the firm Turkcell from acquiring a majority share in Iran’s first private

¹⁵ Turkey plans to assist the export of Iranian oil via pipeline to the Ceyhan terminal on the Mediterranean as well as invest \$2 billion for marketing and transporting Iranian natural gas (Fuller, 2008).

¹⁶ Between 1991 and 2008 Turkey’s exports to Iran increased from \$87 million to \$2 billion, while imports increased from \$91 million to \$ 8.2 billion (Ulgen, 2010)

cell phone operator (Oran, 2010). The Iranian parliament justified itself by accusing TAV and Turkcell of having ties with Israel that would damage Iranian security (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010). However, these events did not stop Turkish investment in Iran. Turkish-Iranian relations have been influenced by both mistrust and the desire to cooperate.

This point is moreover evident in regards to Iran’s nuclear program and Turkey’s approach to the whole controversy. Turkey's less belligerent position vis-a-vis Iran's controversial nuclear program can be understood within the context of its deepening economic ties with Iran and its own desire to act as an energy corridor linking Iranian gas and oil to Western markets. Quite interestingly Erdogan has stated on several occasions that Iran's “military” nuclear program is “just gossip” (“Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” 2010).

Turkey has stated that as a party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and its adjacent protocols, Iran has the right to engage in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, including the enrichment of uranium (which it claims to do), but at the same time is responsible to allow full supervision of its activities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Consequently, Turkey has stated that it would comply with the sanctions imposed on Iran by the international community if the IAEA and the UN Security Council discovered serious illegal activities in Iran’s nuclear program (Oran, 2010).

However, Turkey has so far rejected the UN sanctions since it directly affects Turkish economic interests in the region. Turkey has on this occasion many times stated that the sanctions would be unlikely to change Iranian behavior (Lesser, 2009). In this regard, Western and Turkish approaches to Iran differ. What the international community is proposing is for Iran to end or at

least scale down its enrichment program and in return receive supply of enriched uranium from external sources. However, Iran has refused this proposal¹⁷ (Ulgen, 2010).

This has led to the proposal of further sanctions and isolating Iran by the United States. Turkey, in its turn, is suggesting engaging with, rather than isolating Iran. Turkish authorities believe that a diplomatic solution is achievable. Interestingly, Turkey has mainly brought up the issue of Israel possessing nuclear weapons as a counterbalance to the Iranian nuclear issue (Turan, 2010).

What Turkey has attempted to do in this nuclear conundrum is to use its good relations with the U.S and Iran to help mediate an agreement, and assert itself as a regional power with an influential stature. Turkey had tried in 2010 to broker the IAEA proposal on moving Iran's low-enriched uranium out of the country and in return receiving fuel for a research reactor. However, the deal fell through (Schulte, 2010).

Turkey has also made mediating attempts with Brazil. In May 2010 the foreign ministers of Turkey, Brazil and Iran signed an agreement on a low-enriched nuclear fuel swap. According to this agreement, Iran was to send 1,200 kg of 3.5% enriched uranium to Turkey and in return was to receive 20% enriched uranium from Western countries (Onis, 2011). However, the U.S. did not agree to this plan, claiming that although the U.S. provision was taken into consideration, the amount of uranium Iran possessed had increased to the point where Iran could make a nuclear bomb (Turan, 2010). However, the West, and particularly the U.S. did not approve of this agreement and the UN Security Council went on to approve the fourth sanctions package on Iran the following month. Turkey rejected these sanctions as well (Onis, 2011).

¹⁷ Iran believes that this deal imposes limitations only on Iran and arguing that it violates its sovereign rights under the NPT (Ulgen, 2010).

A meeting of the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: U.S., China, Russia, England, France and Germany) took place in Istanbul in January 2011. However this meeting was unsuccessful in reaching a concensus, which according to Katcher has left the Western countries ever more pessimistic on Turkey's strategy toward the Iranian nuclear issue (2011).

What is noteworthy is that Turkey's own civilian nuclear program and its economic interests in Iran is a major factor in its contention to play a mediating role in the region within the context of the nuclear controversy Iran has created. However, it should be mentioned that in this regard the existing literature does not extensively cover this issue. Only Turkish scholar Sinan Ulgen has covered this topic in two of his works: *Nuclear Policy and Iran: An Opportunity for Turkey*, and *Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: What Role for Turkey?* Ulgen argues that for a better understanding of why the Turkish approach has differed from that of the West in Iran's pursuit for a nuclear program, a more detailed analysis of Turkey's approach to the nuclear issue in general is needed (Ulgen, 2010).

During the 1990s Turkey initiated a program to develop nuclear power; however it was never fully pursued. After the JDP came to power it took on this program in 2008 and announced a tender for the first nuclear plant in the country.¹⁸ This initiative was a result of Turkey's growing demand for electricity, which has led the country to be highly dependent on the import of fossil fuels and natural gas for its electricity production. According to Ulgen, with the implementation

¹⁸ A joint venture was agreed on between the local Ciner group and the Russian state-held Atomeksport Company (Ulgen, 2010).

of this program, Turkey would in 20 years become one of the most substantial markets worldwide for the construction of new nuclear power plants¹⁹ (2010).

Thus this has led Turkey to be more aware and maintain the status quo of the NPT set of rights. However, Turkish authorities are aware that the nuclear controversy provoked by Iran may push the West to adopt stricter rules regarding non-nuclear states' ability to engage in uranium enrichment (Ulgen, 2010).

As a final conclusion for this case study we can state that the West's isolation of Iran has given Turkey an opportunity to be an ideal alternative in terms of economic ties and maintenance of regional stability. Despite certain mistrust between these two countries they have been able to overcome all their differences. Not supporting the West in the Iranian nuclear issue and trying to become a broker in the crisis has helped Turkey somehow implement Davutoglu's Strategic Depth foreign policy. However, Turkey's ties with the West cannot be overridden. Turkey's recent approval of a NATO nuclear defense missile shield directed toward Iran on its soil (Zaman, 2011) has caused tensions between the two states. Hence, Turkey is left at a crossroad between maintaining its ties and position in the West and at the same time engaging with a powerful state that has hostile relations with the U.S.

¹⁹ It is envisaged that Turkey would in 20 years have a nuclear production capacity of 50,000 Mw (Ulgen, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The Justice and Development Party's new foreign policy coined "Strategic Depth" was implemented after their coming to power in 2002 and shifted the country's domestic and foreign policy agenda. It has profoundly impacted the way Turkey operates in its neighborhood and particularly in terms of its relations with the Islamic country's of the Middle East.

The Justice and Development Party's new course in domestic and foreign affairs has led to a shift in the Kemalist policies that had ruled the country since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The JDP has adeptly garnered major support from the Turkish public. While it has an Islamic-oriented membership, the JDP officially represents itself as a secular power and as such has become a source of inspiration for the secular and Muslim-leaning middle class. "Democracy" and "democratization" have been the JDP's domestic policy mantras which, together with an energetic, multi-dimensional foreign policy vision have contributed to elevating Turkey's international profile.

The new entrepreneurial class in Turkey (the "Anatolian bourgeoisie," represented by such influential business associations such as TOBB, MUSAID and TUSAID) has been seeking new markets in new regions such as the Middle East. This factor has been one of the driving forces of Turkey's new active foreign policy. The JDP government has been trying to carefully cultivate an image of Turkey as a successful independent actor in the Middle East, a region looking for new economic alternatives itself, thus creating a supportive atmosphere at home.²⁰ Never before in Turkish history has foreign policy been so inter-linked with its domestic politics. Today, Turkish foreign policy has come under the influence of key economic and civil society actors. In any case it appears the JDP is concentrating on short-term domestic interests and playing on certain foreign policy issues that have played a pivotal role in the JDP's electoral victories (three consecutive elections since 2002).

²⁰ According to Migdalovitz, the support the JDP has received at home is from the so-called "Anatolian bourgeoisie" otherwise known as the "Anatolian tigers." He claims that as this class prospers, it also shares its growing wealth with its favored party or groups that support it, in this case the JDP (2011).

In other words the economic factor has spurred the diversification of Turkey's external relations. This has led to a decline in the share of Turkish trade with the EU countries and a remarkable increase in trade with Arab countries and Iran (Onis, 2011). Hence these new economic developments have helped the JDP consolidate power at home and promote its status as a player on the world stage. This new support base has given the JDP government more assertiveness to seek to gain economic freedom of action in order to become a powerful actor.

This has evidently led to a shift in Turkey's central axis of its foreign policy vision. If for the past eight decades the axis leaned on Western orientation, since the turn of the century it has been trying to create an axis based, multi-dimensional and pro-active foreign policy. Under the JDP, Turkey's commitments to the West and EU membership seem to have lost much of its impetus.²¹ However, this does not mean that Turkey is abandoning its western orientation completely. It is still highly dependent on its trade with Europe and its strategic partnership with NATO. One of the shortcomings of this new foreign policy is that there is no firm axis yet.

The case studies of Syria and Iran show that the power vacuum left by the U.S and the EU due to their isolation policies created fertile ground for Turkey to seek a new independent and assertive foreign policy. However, the Syrian uprising and the heated tensions between Iran and the West have created new obstacles for Turkey, jeopardizing its "zero-problem with neighbors" policy. In any case it is abundantly clear that these cases will be consequential for Turkey's future role in the region.

The JDP has been able to conduct an assertive foreign policy in the Middle East due to the influence of the new entrepreneurial class. This new activism has led to a shift in its central foreign policy axis from a Western orientation to an independent and more assertive new foreign policy which has been the

²¹ President Gül has raised the possibility that Turkey could eventually choose to opt-out of the Union ("President Gül Says Turkey May Join Ranks of BRIC Countries," 2010). There has also been a growing mistrust by the Turkish public toward the West, with the EU's favorability dropping from 58% to 28% from 2004-2010 ("Obama more Popular Abroad than at Home," 2010).

centerpiece of MFA Davutoglu's new foreign policy doctrine (Strategic Depth). However, this has not led to a new firm axis; while attempting to conduct an independent foreign policy in the Middle East, Turkey continues to rely on the West and still continues to pursue EU membership (at least rhetorically). The cases of Turkish-Syrian and Turkish-Iranian relations have been proof of this. This new active foreign policy has in turn helped the JDP consolidate power at home and conduct a domestic policy where it is implicitly and gradually implementing a more Islamic-leaning agenda.²²

A critical factor that is important to note for this research is that the JDP's new foreign policy has its roots in Turkey's recent past. By the end of the 1980s Prime Minister Turgut Ozal had started a process of reform in Turkey's economic and foreign policy spheres. The Islamic-oriented Welfare party that came to power in 1996 tried to implement a more active foreign policy in the Middle East. Minister of Foreign Affairs Ismail Cem (1997-2001) also was an advocate of an assertive foreign policy in all neighboring regions (albeit one with a strong Western leaning). However none of these powers were able to realize this new foreign policy track. It was the JDP that was actually able to clearly define and implement them and this is what makes their case unique and worthy of further study.

²² The JDP has advocated allowing women to wear the turban in public places and criminalize adultery. Also, Prime Minister Erdogan has rejected the idea of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in committing Genocide in Darfur, since according to him it is not possible for a Muslim to commit Genocide.

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