



# Turkish Foreign Policy Toward Syria After 2011: A New Regional Order and the Role of Political Islam

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Turkish Foreign Policy Toward Syria After 2011: A New Regional Order and The  
Role of Political Islam

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## Abstract

This thesis researches the conditions under which Turkey's foreign policy toward Syria shifted following the Arab Springs events. It investigates the role of Political Islam in the Turkish elites' role conception, and its impact on Turkey's foreign policy toward Arab Spring countries and particularly Syria, that aimed at creating a new regional order with Political Islam as its unifying factor and Turkey as its major influencer.

The research findings highlight three roles played by the AKP elites before 2011. The first role 'Defender of faith' is clearly perceived through the AKP's defense of Islam and its compatibility with democratic values, while the second role 'Regional leader' is summed up in the AKP's calls for reform in Muslim countries and in the projection of their economic and political reforms as an inspiration to Arab and Muslim countries. The third role, namely 'Liberation supporter', is reflected in the AKP's policy that champions Islamic causes especially in Palestine.

The findings also reveal the AKP elites' post-2011 persistent role in defending Islam and its compatibility with democracy in addition to supporting the Palestinian cause on the one hand and the calls of Arab masses for reform and democracy on the other.

That said such liberal and humanitarian position is not sufficient to understand Turkey's foreign policy after 2011. It is only by examining the AKP elites' geopolitical and geo-cultural perspectives to the Arab Spring events that Turkey's quest for a new regional order with Political Islam as its uniting factor becomes clear.

The AKP elites saw the Arab Spring as a long overdue natural flow of history. For them, the Arab Spring has brought closure to a period in the region's history

dating back to the era of colonialism that divided countries that were once interconnected under the Ottoman Empire and imposed secularism that separated Islam from political life, and such closure necessitates a new regional order. While the AKP elites did not champion Ottomanism or a pure Arab base for the new regional order they had in mind, their support of Islamic parties, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, clearly reflects their belief that Political Islam is the solution to the Arab regimes' loss of legitimacy.

It is noteworthy that the AKP elites' support to Islamic parties extended beyond the political limits to include their pre-2011 role of defender of Islam and promoter of the Turkish economic and political success stories as a source of inspiration to Arab Spring countries. The aim was to show Western countries that Political Islam is the solution to the problems in Arab countries as manifested by the Turkish experience.

Meanwhile, the Islamic parties acting as 'audience' to Turkish foreign policy roles not only approved of Turkey's role but they saw in it a successful post-Arab Spring blueprint to present to the West despite their reluctance to embrace Western-style secularism.

Lastly, the research findings show that Turkey's support for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was based on its need for a strong partner in the new regional order. The AKP elites were not only betting on Egypt's geopolitical importance but also on its influence on the rest of the Arab countries. Turkey needed an Arab partner for the new regional order and it found an ideal one in Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood.

As I elaborate the findings of my research throughout my thesis, I will lead the reader to the conclusion that the Turkish foreign policy toward Syria after 2011 can only be examined in light of Turkey's vision for post-Arab Spring Middle East.

## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother Amal Zaarour and father Elias Zaarour

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their help and support that allowed me to finish this work.

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## Acronyms and Definitions

AKP	Justice and Development Party
EMB	Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IR	International Relations
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State for the Iraq and Levant
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PKK	Kurdistan's Workers Party
SMB	Syrian Muslim Brotherhood

## Chapter I

### Introduction to Research

The historic relations between Turkey and Syria date back to the Ottoman Empire that ruled much of the Arab world until WWI. Today, Turkey and Syria share a 900 km border, the longest border Turkey has with any of its neighbors. Syria is considered Turkey's gateway to the Arab world as goods transported by road from Turkey to Arab countries in North Africa, the Levant and the Arabian Gulf imperatively pass through Syria. The two countries were at the opposite ends of the Cold War divide; however, their historical, geographical, geopolitical, and cultural realities dictate a closer look at the Turkish-Syrian relations. And while both countries have suffered common issues including their water resources, Kurdish separatism and, later on, the situation in Iraq, their relation best mirrors Turkish foreign policy toward Arab and Muslim worlds, especially after Turkey's 2002 legislative elections that brought the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power.

In this chapter, I introduce my research regarding the role of Political Islam in Turkey's foreign policy toward regime change in Syria following the Arab Spring events. I begin by identifying the research problem and ask a set of questions on what has led Turkey to change its foreign policy toward Syria. The questions are followed by a hypothesis on the role of Political Islam in Turkish elite's national role conception. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the relevance of the work presented.

## Research Problem

Strained since the 1980s, political relations between Turkey and Syria started improving in the late 1990s and following the victory of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey's 2002 legislative elections. The improvement culminated in Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's visit to Ankara in January 2004- the first trip to Turkey by a Syrian president since Syria's independence in 1946.<sup>1</sup>

Economic relations between the two countries were also ameliorated after 2002, with bilateral trade growing from US\$ 773 million in 2002 to US\$ 1,754 million in 2008 and US\$ 2,512 million in 2010.<sup>2</sup> Population movement from Syria to Turkey increased from 126,428 persons in 2002 to 406,935 in 2008 and then to 899,494 in 2010 following Turkey's liberalization of visa requirements for Syrians and other Middle Eastern nationals in 2009.<sup>3</sup> President Al-Assad's visit to Turkey in September 2009 paved the way for the establishment of the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) that was signed in October of the same year.<sup>4</sup> The HLSCC last convened in Ankara at the prime ministerial level in December 2010- ten months before Turkey officially cut its ties with Syria in September 2011.

The improved relations between the two countries were also mirrored in their military activities that included holding joint military exercises in April 2009. While

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen F. Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 4 (2007): 109.

<sup>2</sup> Kemal Kirisci, "Turkey's "Demonstrative Effect" and the Transformation of the Middle East," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 2 (2011): 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>4</sup> Aysegül Kibaroglu, "Turkey-Syria Water Relations: International Development and Political Confrontations in the Euphrates and Tigris Region," Chap. 12, in *Turkey-Syria Relations: Between Enmity and Amity*, edited by Hinnebusch, Raymond and Ozlem Tur, New York: Routledge, 2016. 145-157.

these exercises were not intended to lead to a full military alliance, they provided a psychological boost to the Syrian government. At the cultural level, Turkish television dramas that became extremely popular in the Arab world and reflected Turkey's soft power capabilities were dubbed in none other than the Syrian Arabic accent.<sup>5</sup>

But seven months into the uprising in Syria, Turkey formally severed diplomatic ties with the Syrian government on 21 September 2011. It hosted a Syrian opposition conference in Antalya in June that year and, in July, allowed the formation of the armed opposition group Free Syrian Army (FSA) in Hatay Province.<sup>6</sup> In a televised statement released in November 2011, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan urged President Al-Assad to abdicate. "Just remove yourself from that seat before shedding more blood, before torturing more and for the welfare of your country, as well as the region,"<sup>7</sup> he said to the Syrian President.

Since then, Turkey has called for a buffer zone in Syria to provide safe bases for rebels to continue their war against the Syrian government, and to host the increasing number of refugees.<sup>8</sup> Western journalists have accused Turkey of training and arming the Syrian rebels although Turkey has denied these accusations. Similar accusations also came from Turkish opposition parties. On October 2014, Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, head of the Turkish Republican People's Party (CHP), "produced a statement from the Adana Office of The Prosecutor... maintaining that Turkey supplied weapons to terror groups." Earlier that year the CHP's Vice President Bulent

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Turkey's Global Strategy: Turkey and Syria," In *IDEAS Reports - Special Reports*, edited by Kitchen, Nicholas. SR007 ed. London, UK: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011: 38.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, "Into the Quagmire: Turkey's Frustrated Syria Policy," *Chatham House* (2012): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Sebnem Arsu, "Turkish Premier Urges Assad to Quit in Syria," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2011, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/world/middleeast/turkish-leader-says-syrian-president-should-quit.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, "Into the Quagmire," 8.

Tezcan stated that three trucks on their way to Syria were stopped in Adana for inspection where rockets, arms, and ammunitions were found. Tezcan claimed that agents from Turkey's National Intelligence Organization were supposed to deliver the trucks to the Islamic State for the Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and other groups.<sup>9</sup>

### Research Question and Hypothesis

In this thesis, I aim to answer the following question: What are the conditions that led Turkey to adopt a different policy and pursue a major role in the attempt to change the Syrian regime after it had normalized its relations with Syria and its president?

I divide this question into three sub-questions:

1. In what international and regional geopolitical context did Turkey define its foreign policy toward the Syrian conflict?
2. What role did Political Islam play in Turkey's Syrian foreign policy following the Arab Spring?
3. How did Turkish elites use Political Islam in their national role conception that defined Turkish foreign policy toward Syria?

In this thesis, I argue that the change in Turkey's foreign policy toward Syria following the Arab Spring stems from the AKP elites' religious, political, and cultural belief that Political Islam is the solution to the loss of legitimacy of regimes in the Arab world in general and Syria in particular. Such solution would set a new regional

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<sup>9</sup> David L Phillips, "Research Paper: ISIS- Turkey Links," *The Huffington Post*, last modified September 8, 2016, accessed November 2, 2016 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke\\_b\\_6128950.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke_b_6128950.html). The report by Phillips for Columbia University's Program on Peace-building and Rights examined and assessed Turkish and international media allegations against Turkey for assisting, training, providing medical assistance, and buying ISIS oil... The report drew on a variety of international sources including The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, BBC, Sky News, CNN Turk, Hurriyet Daily News, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, and Radikal among others.

order based on a common religious and cultural foundation that would transcend physical borders with Turkey as its major influencer.

### Research Relevance

Starting in Tunisia in December 2010, the Arab Spring reached Syria in March 2011 when Syrians took to the streets calling for reforms. The events escalated into an internal war with the intervention of the United States, Russia, European Union, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar; a war that has cost the lives of 480,000 Syrians to date and has displaced another 5.2-5.4 million to neighboring countries, not to mention the 6.1 million Syrians that have been internally displaced.<sup>10</sup>

The Syrian war saw the rise of terrorist groups like ISIL- later known as the Islamic State (IS) - and Jabhat al-Nusra (Al-Nusra Front), an affiliate of Al Qaeda. By the summer of 2014, IS had controlled large areas of Iraq and Syria and in June, it declared a self-styled Islamic caliphate and effectually removed the borders between both countries.<sup>11</sup> A 2014 documentary aired by Vice News showed an IS fighter removing the berm at one of the borders between Syria and Iraq while another fighter declared that they have “broken Sykes-Picot” – referring to the agreement between France and Britain to divide the territories of the Ottoman Empire after WWI.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, "Syria Emergency," last modified December 7, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>; Mercy Corps, "Quick Facts: What You Need to Know about the Syria Crisis," Mercy Corps, last modified October 23, 2017, accessed December 22, 2017, <https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis>.

<sup>11</sup> Al Jazeera, "Sunni Rebels Declare New 'Islamic Caliphate'", *Al Jazeera*, last modified June 30, 2014, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/isil-declares-new-islamic-caliphate-201462917326669749.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Vice News, *The Islamic State (Part5)*, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/video/the-islamic-state-part-5>.



After six years of fighting, Syria is now divided into zones of influence controlled by the Syrian government, IS, Al-Nusra Front, Kurdish fighters of the People's Protection Units and other rebel forces with no political solution on the horizon. This has led U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in 2016 to inform the Senate Foreign Relations Committee "that Washington could move towards a "Plan B" that could include a partition of Syria, if the current ceasefire plan fails and the fighting continues unabated."<sup>13</sup>

Besides causing a humanitarian crisis and erasing the borders between Syria and Iraq, the Syrian war has affected and changed the regional status quo. The last time a regional power had tried to change this status quo was in 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait in an attempt to fill a vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The systemic forces at that time restated the status quo<sup>14</sup> through a U.S.-led coalition that included Syria.

The previous two regime changes in the Arab world - namely Iraq's invasion by the United States in 2003 and the ousting of its president Saddam Hussein, and NATO's intervention and aerial support to Libyan rebels that led to the fall of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011- were staged by international superpowers. However, the war in Syria has shown that regional medium powers like Turkey are capable of attempting a change in the region's status quo and effecting regime changes by joining forces with other regional countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The increased capabilities and willingness of regional powers to get involved in direct

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<sup>13</sup> Rami Khouri, "Wars in Arab States? Partition them!" *Agence Global*, last modified February 26, 2016, accessed September 11, 2016, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/wars-arab-states-partition-them>

<sup>14</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World [Dis]Order," *Intellectual Discourse* 2, no. 2 (1994): 116.

conflicts is also reflected in Iran's support of Iraq and Syria, and Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen.

Studying Turkey's foreign policy in the Syrian conflict is essential to understanding how medium powers influence politics in their immediate regions and the methods they use to achieve their goals. On the other hand, examining the change in Turkey's foreign policy allows us to understand how political leaders use religious discourse in regime changes and the role these policies have in increased religious tensions and in the disintegration of countries along sectarian lines.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I review works that used Role Theory to explain Turkey's foreign policy toward the Middle East in general and Syria in particular. I show that Political Islam was discussed in these works as championing general Islamic causes like development in the Islamic world and the Palestinian cause in the Palestinian- Israeli conflict rather than regime changes.

The second section of the chapter reviews works that examined Turkey's position vis-à-vis the Syrian government based on different International Relations (IR) theories. I aim to show that traditional IR theories are not sufficient to explain Turkey's foreign policy change toward Syria.

#### National Role Concept in AKP's Middle Eastern Foreign Policy

This section is divided into four parts. I start with an overview of the international and regional geopolitical situation that influenced Turkey's Middle Eastern activism. Then I examine issues that are specific to both Turkey and Syria, namely Kurdish nationalism, water appropriation, security in Iraq following the 2003 US invasion, and both countries' relations with Israel. It must be borne in mind here that the relations between Turkey and Syria cannot be studied separately from the improvement of Turkish relations with the Middle East in general and Arab countries in specific. Case in point: as early as 1995, Turkey was seen as an example for the

Arab world in terms of economic performance, secularization, and democracy.<sup>15</sup> The ‘North’ [West] also saw Turkey “...as an alternative model to Islamic radicalism for the Arab Middle East and the rest of the Islamic world.”<sup>16</sup> This improvement was mainly driven by Turkish domestic democratic, political and economic reforms that contributed widely to the creation of a new foreign policy toward the Middle East. Lastly, I review articles that used Role Theory to explain Turkish foreign policy activism.

### International and Regional Geopolitical Situation

During the Cold War, the roles middle-range powers could play were limited and fixed to those assigned to them by the superpowers. But by the end of the Cold War, middle-range powers like Turkey enjoyed greater space to maneuver and extend their influence.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the post-Cold War era presented challenges to Turkish leaders who were worried about their country’s geostrategic importance to the West.<sup>18</sup> Such concerns – among others- led Turkey’s first post-Cold War president Turgut Ozal to take part in the 1990 Gulf War and to permit the US Air Force to use the NATO bases in Turkey.<sup>19</sup>

The first transformation in Turkey’s foreign policy took place in the early 1990s when President Ozal laid the foundation of a new philosophy in foreign policy

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<sup>15</sup> Ziya Onis, "Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era: In Search of Identity," *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 1 (1995): 48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Sabri Sayari, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 179.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 170-171.

known as ‘neo-Ottomanism’. His philosophy represented a paradigm shift from existing Kemalism and its maxim ‘Peace at Home, Peace Abroad’ by calling for “Turkish pursuit of active and diversified foreign policy in the region based on the Ottoman historical heritage.”<sup>20</sup> Ozal’s party Anavatan (The Motherland) served as an ideological precursor to the AKP party.<sup>21</sup>

The September 11 attacks however, created a new geopolitical situation for Turkey and the world as the United States shaped a new international order based on a security discourse. But all this changed under President Obama who created a new vision based on a multilateral international system where nation states met to “create solutions for the global political, cultural, and economic turmoil.”<sup>22</sup> This new reality required cooperation between the United States and its allies in addressing regional and international matters.

Also, the first decade of the new millennium saw the waning of Arab nationalism and the ascendancy of Political Islam. Political and economic crises broke out across the region questioning the legitimacy of Arab states. As a result, Turkey was seen in a new light across the Middle East and its soft power capabilities increased.<sup>23</sup> The AKP’s election victory, and the political and economic reforms it initiated showed that Islam was compatible with democracy and that it can be moderated.<sup>24</sup> The AKP’s experience changed the way Turkey was viewed by the Arab world. Arab intellectuals changed their perspective of Turkey as “a binary opposition

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 946-947.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* (2010): 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Meliha Benli Altunisik, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 2 (2008): 42-43.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 45.

between a ‘small secular elite’ and ‘populous but powerless Islamic masses’, ” and Arab Islamists saw an example on how to engage in politics while maintaining their religious and conservative beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

#### Turkish Syrian Common Issues

Kurdish nationalism has always been a central issue in the relations between Turkey, Syria and Iran. In 1998, Turkey accused Syria of providing help and shelter to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) fighters and threatened to intervene militarily. Tensions abated, however, when Syria expelled PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from its territories and signed the Adana Protocol in 1998.<sup>26</sup>

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Kurdish issue became a point of rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus in light of their joint concern over the disintegration of Iraq and the formation of a Kurdish state in the north that would lead to irredentism among the Kurdish minority populations in their respective countries.<sup>27</sup> Both countries also feared that militant Islamists and sectarian fighting would fill the power vacuum created in Iraq; consequently, Turkey attempted to engage its southern neighbours to address these concerns, and Syria “proved an obvious diplomatic partner in this.”<sup>28</sup>

Another cause of tension between Turkey and Syria was the issue of apportionment of water resources of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. The problem

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>26</sup> Bulent Aras and Hasan Koni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2002): 55.

<sup>27</sup> Kilic Bugra Kanat, "Continuity of Change in Turkish Foreign Policy Under the JDP Government: The Cases of Bilateral Relations with Israel and Syria," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2012): 243.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Into the Quagmire," 4.

was exacerbated by the increase in Syrian demand to irrigate two agricultural projects developed in 1987 and 1992 on the one hand, and Turkey's irrigation schemes for the Southeast Anatolian Project and the water needed for the Ataturk and Karakaya Dams on the other.<sup>29</sup> However, the improved political relations between the two countries after 1998 helped with the water appropriation issue as Turkey increased the water flow to Syria to 900 cubic meters per second from the 1987 agreed flow rate.<sup>30</sup> The water problems were further resolved in 2008 when Turkey, Syria and Iraq agreed to hold regular summits for discussing the allocation of water from the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.<sup>31</sup>

Also, Turkey's closer ties with Israel in the mid-1990s caused further tension with Syria. Driven by the PKK's increased attacks, Turkey sought to utilize Israel's intelligence and military capabilities in its fight against Kurdish nationalism.<sup>32</sup> Eventually, the improved relations between Turkey and Syria and the former's quest to play the role of regional mediator paved the way for Turkish mediation of indirect talks between Israel and Syria in 2008. However, the talks ceased following Israel's operation Cast Lead against Gaza in 2008-2009.<sup>33</sup>

#### Domestic Democratic, Political and Economic Reforms

The ideational factors in the Turkish-Arab relations cannot be ignored when examining Turkey's foreign policy. The Sevres Syndrome – which is based on the notion that Turkey is surrounded by enemies played a vital role in the minds of the

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<sup>29</sup> Aras and Koni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited," 52-53.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Turkey's Global Strategy," 38.

<sup>32</sup> Kanat, "Continuity of Change in Turkish Foreign Policy," 230-249.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Into the Quagmire," 3.

Turkish people and foreign policy makers since the end of WWI and up to the end of the Cold War. Throughout the Republican period, “Turkish consciousness of Arabs and Syrians has not occurred ex nihilo, but has been represented through the restructuralization of the past and its incorporation into a modern consciousness.”<sup>34</sup> Authors Bulent Aras and Hasan Koni quoted Jutta Weldes to explain how insecurity affected the construction of identity and the role the ‘other’ or ‘others’ play:

insecurity is itself the product of processes of identity construction in which the self and the other, or multiple others, are constituted... they can all be seen as resting on the assumption that identity and insecurity are produced in a mutually constitutive process.<sup>35</sup>

Turks saw the ‘other’ Arab world as problematic and their association with it as negative, while Arabs saw the Ottoman era as one of decay.<sup>36</sup> However, the domestic political and economic reforms launched in Turkey after 1997 and stepped up following the AKP’s 2002 victory led to the emergence of a new imagination and rhetoric with respect to the Middle East and a “shift from bad neighbourhood to a zero-problem policy towards this region”<sup>37</sup> and Syria was seen as a potential ally and friend.<sup>38</sup> The reforms included changes “in the fields of civil-military relations, national security, and economic liberalization and stability...”<sup>39</sup> These reforms resulted in the elimination of the range of ‘others’ within the country and its

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<sup>34</sup> Aras and Koni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited," 47.

<sup>35</sup> Jutta Weldes, *Cultures of Insecurity States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 10-11, quoted in Bulent Aras and Hasan Koni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited," 49.

<sup>36</sup> Aras and Koni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited," 48-50.

<sup>37</sup> Bulent Aras and Rabia Karakaya Polat, "Turkey and the Middle East: Frontiers of the New Geographic Imagination," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 4 (2007): 471.

<sup>38</sup> Bulent Aras and Rabia Karakaya Polat, "From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran," *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 5 (2008): 510.

<sup>39</sup> Aras and Polat, "Turkey and the Middle East," 472.



surroundings and shaped a new regional identity<sup>40</sup> different from the ones created by Turkish elites up till the end of the Cold War.

Issues with Syria, such as Kurdish nationalism, and with Iran, namely ‘reactionary’ Islam, were previously considered national security - rather than political – threats and were included in the 1997 National Security Policy Document. However, the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in Nairobi in 1999 and the resolution to recognise Turkey as a candidate country at the Helsinki Summit that same year created a favourable environment for the debate about Turkey’s definition of national security. A process of ‘desecuritization’ unfolded, removing such issues from the security agenda and placing them into the public political domain. After 1999, the country saw a shift in the National Security Council in favor of civilian members and this “facilitated a decline in the role of the military in the securitization of political issues at domestic and international levels.”<sup>41</sup>

Turkey’s accession talks with the European Union (EU) led to the adoption of EU norms and principles. This in turn contributed to the democratization process at the domestic level that also reflected in foreign policy issues.<sup>42</sup> Political reforms engaged civil society organizations in politics. As a result, the people and the civil society became vocal on issues of foreign policy. What was previously isolated from the public debate was now part of the normal political discourse and “the changing patterns of relations between the securitisers (mainly the civilian-military

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<sup>40</sup> Bulent Aras, "Turkey's Rise in the Greater Middle East: Peace-Building in the Periphery," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 33.

<sup>41</sup> Aras and Polat, "Turkey and the Middle East," 473-474.

<sup>42</sup> Aras and Polat, "From Conflict to Cooperation," 496.

bureaucracy) and society play[ed] an influential role in shaping the new regional policy and a redefinition of alliance and cooperation prospects.”<sup>43</sup>

Internally, domestic improvement in economic conditions affected Turkey’s foreign policy toward its immediate neighborhood and the Middle East. Turkey’s aim was to reach full economic integration with its regional partners through increased trade, free trade zones and relaxation of visa requirements.<sup>44</sup> As a result, total bilateral trade with Arab countries increased from US\$ 6,165 million in 2002 to US\$ 35,921 million in 2008 and to US\$ 32,490 million in 2010.<sup>45</sup> The country also saw a spike in the number of incoming Arab population that reached 1.9 million in 2010 compared to 332,000 in 1991.<sup>46</sup>

Using Richard Rosecrance’s<sup>47</sup> notion concept of the ‘trading state’ and Robert Putnam’s<sup>48</sup> idea of ‘two-level diplomatic games’, Kemal Kirisci attributed the transformation of Turkish foreign policy to the liberalization of the Turkish economy and the adoption of export-oriented policies coupled with a shift in foreign policy “from a repertoire based on the military-political and territorial system to policies associated with the trading state.”<sup>49</sup> According to Kirisci, these factors were facilitated

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<sup>43</sup> Aras and Polat. "Turkey and the Middle East," 475.

<sup>44</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, "Turkish foreign policy: Framework, values and mechanisms," *International Journal* 67, no. 1 (2011-12): 16.

<sup>45</sup> Kirisci, "Turkey's Demonstrative Effect," 38.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), quoted in Kemal Kirisci, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, (2009): 29.

<sup>48</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988), quoted in Kemal Kirisci, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, (2009): 29.

<sup>49</sup> Kirisci, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40, (2009): 43.

by policies adopted by President Ozal in the 1980s and early 1990s and reinforced by the AKP after 2002.

On the other hand, the rise of strong business interest groups and their interaction with various government agencies and the government itself also had an effect on lobbying in support of the adoption of policies of a trading state that would reflected in foreign policy. These business interest groups had the capabilities of shaping public opinion and forming alliances with government agencies and their counterparts in other countries.<sup>50</sup> As an example during the Conference on Investment in the Syrian Coast held by the Turkish-Syrian Business Council in October 2010, Turkish State Minister for Foreign Trade Zafer Çağlayan announced that his country's investments in Syria amounted to USD 700 million.<sup>51</sup>

#### Turkish Elites and the National Role Concept

In the previous parts of this chapter, I discussed the international and regional contexts of Turkish activism in the Middle East and how domestic democratic, political and economic reforms have offered Turkey a new perception toward the Middle East. However, a comprehensive review of this activism is only possible through the study of the AKP elites' vision that had a major effect on Turkish foreign policy. Role Theory that I use in this thesis provides the essential tools for the study of Turkish foreign policy thanks to its rich descriptive vocabulary "in categorizing the beliefs, images, and identities that individuals and groups develop for themselves and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 46-47. These business group included: The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD), the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD), the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), Turkish Exporters Assembly (TİM), the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK), the International Transporters Association (UND), and the Turkish Contractors Association (TMD), and also local business associations, such as the İstanbul Chamber of Commerce (İSO).

<sup>51</sup> Kirisci, "Turkey's Demonstrative Effect," 39.

others, as well as the types of processes and structures that govern their deployment in particular situations.”<sup>52</sup> Based on this theory, the role bearer’s conceptions as well as “society’s demands (role expectations), and the particular context in which the role is being acted out”<sup>53</sup> are analyzed.

In spite of their Islamic background, the AKP’s elites positioned the party in the center right spectrum of Turkish politics. Their policies from 2002 till 2007 were geared to liberalize Turkish politics under the effect of the European Union. That said, the “major ideological pillar of the party [and the AKP elites] has always been conservatism in a new mould” and the elites’ “Islamist conservative ideology has caused Islam to emerge as a significant asset of their foreign policy”, as apparent in Turkish Middle Eastern policy and in their sensitivity to the Palestinian cause.<sup>54</sup>

One of the major influencers on the Turkish foreign policy was Ahmet Davutoğlu<sup>55</sup>. Turkey’s former Prime Minister set its general foreign policy toward the Middle East and the Muslim world, in light of the international geopolitical changes that took place with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the bipolar world order. He positioned Turkey as a ‘central power’ owing to its unique geographic and geocultural position, and expected it to play a proactive role in

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<sup>52</sup> Cameron G. Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," *International Studies Association Compendium Project*, May 2009, accessed October 1, 2016, [myweb.uiowa.edu/bhlai/workshop/role.pdf](http://myweb.uiowa.edu/bhlai/workshop/role.pdf). 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson, and Suzette Grillot, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy: Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," *Political Psychology* (International Society of Political Psychology) 17, no. 4 (December 1996): 733.

<sup>54</sup> Sevket Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East: A Role Theory Perspective," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 20, no. 1 (2013): 6.

<sup>55</sup> United Nations. "The Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey Ahmet Davutoğlu" United Nations, February 15, 2017, <http://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/03/biography-Ahmet-Davutoğlu.pdf>. Davutoğlu served as Prime Minister of Turkey from August 2014 till May 2016 and as Minister of Foreign Affairs from May 2009 till August 2014. From November 2002 till May 2009 Davutoğlu served as Chief Adviser to Turkey’s Prime Minister and Ambassador-at-Large. Davutoğlu’s academic career spans from 1983 till 2004.

shaping its neighborhood.<sup>56</sup> In his 2001 book *'The Strategic Depth'*, Davutoğlu advocated building economic and cultural tools with Turkey's neighbors that would reduce political tension and allow the development of transport capabilities, cross-border trade, cultural exchange as well as transfer of manpower and capital. He cited as an example the potential for economic integration between the north of Syria with Aleppo as its center on the one hand and the southern Anatolian agricultural towns and the industrial cities of Gaziantep and Marash on the other.<sup>57</sup>

The author opined that in 2010 - two decades after the end of the Cold War, no new world order had yet been established with a mechanism to settle international challenges. As such, it was up to nation-states to create solutions to these political, cultural and economic challenges, and Turkey aimed to play a central role in international security and prosperity through its foreign policy.<sup>58</sup> Davutoğlu's 'Zero Problems' foreign policy was based on three methodological and five operations principles. The methodological principles stated that the foreign policy represented a visionary approach- case in point, the attempts to mediate between Syria and Israel; that it was consistent and systematic; and that it adopted "a new discourse and diplomatic style, which has resulted in the spread of Turkish soft power in the region." The operational principles, on the other hand, included a balance between security and democracy; zero problems with neighbors that aimed not only at the improvement of political relations but also at economic interdependence, and

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<sup>56</sup> Saban Kardas, "From Zero Problems to Leading the Change: Making Sense of Transformation in Turkey's Regional Policy," *International Policy and Leadership Institute- Tepav* 5, (2012): 3.

<sup>57</sup> Davutoğlu, *The Strategic Depth*, Trans. Thalji, Mohamed Jaber and Tarek Abdel Jalil, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2010), 172-173.

<sup>58</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy," 1-2.

proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy as seen in the mediation efforts Turkey undertook between Israel and Syria. Also, these principles included a multi-dimensional foreign policy, and rhythmic diplomacy through Turkey's membership in the G-20, its participation in the meetings of the Arab League as well as the dialogue it held with the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states and other international bodies. Turkey's foreign policy was based on a "better understanding of the realities of the new century, even as [Turkey] acts in accordance with its historical and geopolitical position."<sup>59</sup> In an interview he gave in 2002, Davutoğlu called for "Turkey to build its relations with all the global powers through the Middle East [and] the more central its position becomes in the Middle East, the more persuasive it will become over the others."<sup>60</sup>

Based on K.J Holsti's definition of national role conception and categorization in his 1970 seminal work<sup>61</sup>, and on the statements, speeches and writings of then AKP elites President Abdulla Gül, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Vice President Omer Celik, and Chief Negotiator with EU Ali Babacan, Sevkettin Ovali defined the following seven role conceptions in the foreign policy adopted by the AKP's elites: 'regional leader', 'regional protector', 'model role', 'bridge role', 'mediator role', 'liberalizer' and 'defender of Islam'.<sup>62</sup> The

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 4-6.

<sup>60</sup> Davutoğlu, *Teoriden Pratiğe: Türk Dış Politikası Üzerine Konuşmalar* (Istanbul: Küre, 2013), 83 quoted in Emre Ersen, "Geopolitical Codes in Davutoğlu's Views," *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 1 (2014): 93.

<sup>61</sup> K.J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1970): 264. Holsti defined a topology of seventeen role conceptions to reflect the degree of passivity or activity in countries' foreign policy. These roles are: Bastion of Revolution- Liberator, Regional Leader, Regional Protector, Active Independent, Liberation Supporter, Anti-Imperialist Agent, Defender of the Faith, Mediator-Integrator, Regional-Subsystem Collaborator, Developer, Bridge, Faithful Ally, Independent, Example, Internal Development, Isolate, and Protectee.

<sup>62</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East," 7-10.

‘regional leader’ role addressed “two constitutive elements of the new Turkish identity in the Middle East”, first the Ottoman imperial heritage as protector of the holy lands in Palestine was “a vital component of Islamist identity”, and second the Turkish self-confidence following the political and economic reforms launched by the AKP. The ‘regional protector’ role was attributed to the concerns of the AKP’s elites about restoring Turkey’s “Cold War image as a collaborator of Western powers.” Turkey’s ‘model role’ was mirrored in its economic successes and political system that reconciled Islam and democracy as ‘a source of inspiration’ to Islamic and Arab countries. The ‘bridge role’, saw Turkey serve as a bridge and initiator of dialogue between the East and the West. The ‘mediator role’, on the other hand, referred to Turkey’s mediation efforts between Syria and Israel before 2010, and between Iran and the P5 +1 (permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany) regarding Iran’s nuclear program.<sup>63</sup>

The two additional roles investigated by Ovali that are important to this thesis are the ‘liberalizer’ and ‘defender of Islam’ roles. The role of ‘liberalizer’ corresponds to Holsti’s ‘liberation supporter’ role. Holsti defined this role as:

the liberation supporter does not indicate formal responsibilities for organizing, leading, or physically supporting liberation movements abroad. Most statements supporting liberation movements appear routine and formal; they suggest rather unstructured and vague attitudes about actions required to enact the role conception.<sup>64</sup>

Turkey played the role of ‘liberalizer’ through the promotion and export of liberal values like democracy, gender equality and transparency to its Islamic

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 263.

neighborhood, and the support of societal demands after the Arab Spring and the calls for democracy in Syria.<sup>65</sup>

The role of ‘defender of Islam’ corresponds to the ‘Defender of faith’ role in Holsti’s work and required its holder to defend the faith from outside attacks. Holsti defined ‘Defender of the faith’ role as:

Some governments view their foreign policy objectives and commitments in terms of defending value systems (rather than specified territories) from attack. Those who espouse the defender of the faith national role conception presumably undertake special responsibilities to guarantee ideological purity for a group of other states.<sup>66</sup>

Ovali quoted Erdoğan who in 2008 stated “We did not imitate the arts and science of the West but unfortunately its immorality”. Through this role, Turkey wanted to defend Islam from a system of Western values while aiming to adopt the West’s industrial and technological development. The AKP’s claim of ideological purity allowed Turkey to play this role in which it aimed to speak on behalf of the Palestinians and to represent the Muslim world in Europe and show Islam’s uniqueness. The author also quoted Erdoğan who argued in 2005, “Turkey’s future does not depend on EU membership, but the future of Christianity and Islam does.” He also quoted Ali Babacan who said in 2011 that, “one of the big themes about why Turkey cannot become a member of the European Union is because it is a Christian club.”<sup>67</sup>

That said Turkish activism in the Middle East was not only affected by national role concepts of the AKP’s elites but by international influences as well. These influences included US role expectations for Turkey in the Middle East following the September 11 attacks. Furthermore, both Turkey’s diminishing role in

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<sup>65</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East," 8.

<sup>66</sup> Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 264.

<sup>67</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East," 9-10.



the Caucasus and Central Asia and the rise of the European Union as a soft power in the Balkans left the AKP elites with the Middle East to exercise their foreign policy role conceptions.<sup>68</sup> Ovali quoted then US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz who stated in 2002 that, “Modern Turkey demonstrates that a democratic system is indeed compatible with Islam”, and former US president Barack Obama who in his 2009 visit to Turkey observed that “Modern Turkey was built on similar values [to the US] as a secular country respecting religious freedom, rule of law and all freedoms.” President Obama’s message conveyed the importance his administration placed on Turkey on the one hand and his country’s concerns about Islam and Turkey’s role in the Middle East on the other.<sup>69</sup>

Other authors to use the Role Theory to explain Turkey’s foreign policy activism in the Middle East were Bulent Aras and Aylin Gorener. Analyzing the statements and speeches of then Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, and using the role categories of Chafetz *et al*<sup>70</sup>, Aras and Gorener determined the following role concepts in the statements of the two leaders: ‘regional leader’, ‘regional protector’, ‘regional sub-systems collaborator’, ‘global sub-system collaborator’, ‘example’ and ‘bridge’.<sup>71</sup> The authors went on to show the consistency of the role conceptions adopted by the AKP’s elites since they came to power in 2002, highlighting the increase in identification with roles like ‘regional leader’, ‘regional

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 734. Chafetz *et al* modified Holsti’s original role conceptions typology and identified thirteen nation role conceptions that included: Regional Leader, Global System Leader, Regional Protector, Anti-Imperialist, Mediator-Integrator, Example, Protectee, Regional Subsystem Collaborator, Global System Collaborator, Bridge, Internal Developer, Active Independent, Active Independent, and Independent.

<sup>71</sup> Bulent Aras and Aylin Gorener, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 81.

protector’, and ‘global system collaborator’ and, on the other hand, the reduced identification with the role of ‘bridge’. Such consistency was attributed to greater confidence in the AKP’s foreign policy.

The ‘regional leader’ role addressed two main components of the *Strategic Depth* doctrine written by Davutoğlu, namely the geographical depth and the historical depth of Turkey. Aras and Gorener quoted Davutoğlu who stated in 2001 that, “This geographical depth places Turkey right at the epicenter of many geographical areas of influence.” According to Davutoğlu, the country’s historical and cultural depth, legacy of the Ottoman Empire, brings a new geographic imagination and ‘closeness’ with neighboring regions. The role of ‘regional protector’ arose from Turkey’s sense of responsibility to provide stability to itself and its surrounding regions with which it shared a historical heritage. The authors quoted Davutoğlu who stated that, “Beyond representing the 70 million people of Turkey, we have a historic debt to those lands where there are Turks or which was related to our land in the past. We have to repay this debt in the best way.”<sup>72</sup> They also quoted Erdoğan who stated, “I believe that Turkey has a lot to do in the Middle East. We are aware of this responsibility. We are here for this.”<sup>73</sup>

The ‘regional sub-system collaborator’ role highlighted Turkey’s efforts to take on a leadership role in “constructing a stable and cooperative regional security environment in the Middle East.” The ‘global sub-system collaborator’ role showed Turkey’s active participation in global and regional arrangements.<sup>74</sup> A role particularly important for the Middle East, the ‘example’, presented Turkey as a

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 82-84.

Muslim nation with a secular state and a democratic regime committed to political<sup>75</sup> and economic reforms. Lastly, the role of ‘bridge’ became more apparent following the September 11 attacks. For Davutoğlu, Turkey is more than a bridge country. It is a ‘central country’ at the crossroads of different geographies, cultures and civilizations, hence its role of intercultural dialogue facilitator.<sup>76</sup>

In their article, Ozgur Ozdamar, B. Toygar Halistoprak and I. Erkam Sula discussed Turkey’s foreign policy roles before and after the Arab Spring. The authors argued that the Arab Spring caused Turkey “to change its emphasis from roles built on soft power instruments to harder roles requiring material capabilities.”<sup>77</sup> Similar to Ovali, and Aras and Gorener, the authors analyzed the speeches of AKP elites Gül, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu. They identified eleven Turkish foreign policy role conceptions regarding the Middle East: ‘mediator’, ‘defender of regional peace and stability’, ‘regional system collaborator’, ‘good neighbor’, ‘bridge across civilizations’, ‘trading state’, ‘central/pivotal country’, ‘active independent country’, ‘developer’, ‘protector of the oppressed’ and ‘model/example country’.<sup>78</sup>

According to Ozadamar, Halistoprak, and Sula, the roles of ‘mediator’, ‘defender of regional peace and security’, ‘regional subsystem collaborator’, ‘good neighbor’, and ‘trading state’ lost prominence<sup>79</sup> since the beginning of the Arab Spring as a result of Turkey’s involvement therein and its fraying relations with Syria.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 85-86.

<sup>77</sup> Ozgur Ozdamar, B. Toygar Halistoprak and I. Erkam Sula, "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 11, no. 42 (2014): 93.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, Turkey could no longer act as mediator between Syria and Israel, and economic activity with Syria fell sharply.

Previously, Turkey had played the role of ‘mediator’ in its efforts to strengthen peace and stability within its immediate region as stated by Gül at the United Nations General Assembly in 2004. Similarly, Turkey’s promotion of regional cooperation through institutions like the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) alluded to its role as ‘regional subsystem collaborator’, while its zero-problems-with-neighbors policy architected by Davutoğlu mirrored its role of ‘good neighbor’. Another role defined by the authors, ‘bridge across civilizations’, showcased Turkey’s responsibilities in bringing closer the Muslim and Christian civilizations by becoming the voice of Muslims in the West. The role of ‘trading state’ referred to Turkey’s policy toward diversifying its trade partners and opening up markets in Africa and the Middle East.<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand, the authors claimed that the roles of ‘central/pivotal country’, ‘active independent country’, ‘developer’, ‘model/example country’ and ‘protector of the oppressed’ have gained more prominent in the discourses of the AKP elites since the beginning of the Arab Spring.

In the ‘central/pivotal’ role, the AKP elites saw Turkey as the hub of “different regions, cultures, alliances and economic relations” while they saw Turkey’s efforts to increase its independence through trade and diplomatic relationships in its role of ‘active independent country’. The authors voiced similar views of the ‘model/example country’ role as others authors reviewed in this thesis, whereas Turkey’s democratic and secular system in a Muslim-majority country was seen as an example for other countries in the region. Lastly, Turkey’s increased

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 103-104.

initiatives to assist developing countries highlighted its role as ‘developer’, and its support for rights of the Syrian people in the ongoing conflict on the one hand and of the Palestinians in Gaza under Israeli blockade on the other presented it in the role of ‘protector of the oppressed’.<sup>81</sup>

In analyzing Turkey’s power capacity in the region, Aylin Gurzel discussed the roles played by Turkish foreign policy, namely ‘natural leader’ of the region, historical ‘big brother’ and the ‘protector’ of the Muslim minorities. This foreign policy was labeled ‘neo-Ottomanism’ even though AKP elites like Davutoğlu rejected this label.<sup>82</sup> Omer Taspinar defined the AKP’s neo-Ottoman tendencies in three ways: First, Turkey’s willingness to come to terms with its Ottoman heritage. Neo-Ottomanism did not entail imperialistic tendencies, but included Turkey’s use of its political, economic and cultural soft power capabilities and influence in previous Ottoman Empire territories. Second, neo-Ottomanism gave Turkey a sense of grandeur; and third, it allowed it to embrace the Islamic world and the West at the same time, and to favor a more moderate version of secularism at home.<sup>83</sup> However, for Gurzel, Turkey aimed to solidify its role as ‘rising power’ and to assume its historical role of leader of the Muslim world and natural leader of the region. The author quoted Fehmi Kinay, AKP parliamentarian since 2002, who stated in 2014 that Erdoğan could unite the Sunnis sects. Gurzel argued that Turkey’s support for extremist Sunni Muslim groups in Syria as well as Erdoğan’s visit to Libya in 2011 and his relations with the leader of the National Transitional Council there are all

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 104-105.

<sup>82</sup> Aylin Gurzel, "Turkey's Role as a Regional and Global Power and its Power Capacity: Turkey's Engagement with Other Emerging States," *Revista De Sociologia e Politica* 22, no. 50 (2014): 98-99.

<sup>83</sup> Omer Taspinar, "The Three Strategic Visions of Turkey," *Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings* no. 50 (2011): 2.

examples of Turkey's role as 'big brother' and 'protector' and of its president's will to be a Muslim leader.<sup>84</sup>

### Turkey and Regime Change in Syria After the Arab Spring

In this section, I review works that discussed the reasons behind Turkey's policy change toward Syria following the Arab Spring events. I highlight the IR theories that constitute the basis of these analyses, and show that said theories are not sufficient to justify Turkey's policy change.

Up to the Arab Spring events, Syria was considered the poster child of Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbors' foreign policy.<sup>85</sup> As previously discussed, this was evident in improved bilateral trade relations, increased tourism and migration flow between the two countries, coordination efforts on common issues including Kurdish nationalism, the situation in Iraq and the water issues, not to mention Turkey's mediation efforts, albeit unsuccessful, to solve the conflict between Syria and Israel.

Turkey pursued its economic interdependence efforts with its neighbors. In this framework, a new border post with Syria was opened in 2009 and there were talks to clear the landmine fields laid across both countries' borders during the Cold War. Moreover, the railway line between Turkey, Syria and Iraq was upgraded and reopened in 2009, and a fast-train service between the trading hubs of Gaziantep in southeast Turkey and Aleppo in north Syria was being planned. A pan-Middle Eastern electrical grid covering seven countries of which Turkey and Syria was also being

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<sup>84</sup> Gurzel, "Turkey's Role as a Regional and Global Power," 99.

<sup>85</sup> Kardas, "From Zero Problems to Leading the Change," 5.

discussed.<sup>86</sup> For Turkey, such interdependence served a double function: on the one hand, it was a tool for conflict resolution and peace building and on the other, it opened up new markets for Turkish businesses.<sup>87</sup>

But with the Arab Spring events, Turkey's 'zero problems' policy was no longer reasonable as the country faced 'zero neighbours without problems'.<sup>88</sup> Adopting a neo-realist approach, Moshe Ma'oz attributed the change in Turkey's policy toward Syria to the growing regional geostrategic contest between Turkey and Iran. According to the author, the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with the election of President Morsi in 2012 presented Turkey with an opportunity to forge a partnership with Egypt. Ma'oz quoted Davutoğlu who in 2011 stated that such partnership "could create a new democratic axis of power"<sup>89</sup> that would contain Iran's attempts to create a 'Shi'i Crescent' and control oil resources in the [Arabian] Gulf region.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the reasons behind Turkey's aim for a regime change in Syria were not purely humanitarian, but had to do with its desire to establish a Sunni Muslim-majority democratic government in Syria that would join the Turkish-Egyptian axis to reduce Iran's influence on the Syrian Alawite regime- the major component of the 'Shi'i Crescent' that includes Iraq, Syria and Lebanon and extended into the Mediterranean.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Hugh Pope, "Pax Ottomana? The Mixed Success of Turkey's New Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Relations) 89, no. 6 (2010): 166.

<sup>87</sup> Kirisci, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy," 42.

<sup>88</sup> Omer Taspınar, 'Turkey's strategic vision and Syria', *Washington Quarterly*, 35(3), 2012: 135 quoted in Bulent Aras, "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy Revisited," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 16, no. 4 (2014): 405.

<sup>89</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, "The "Arab Spring" and the New Geo-strategic Environment in the Middle East," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 4 (2012): 17.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*.

Author Jamal Wakim also took a neo-realist approach and imputed the change in Turkey's Syrian policy to the role the United States wanted it to play in the Arab world where an alliance between Turkey and Arab countries would block Russia's, China's and Iran's access to the East Mediterranean or the Indian Ocean.<sup>92</sup> In 2005, Iran became an observing member in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that was formed in 2001 to counter US hegemony. The organization included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>93</sup> This organization covered 60 percent of the landmass of Eurasia and embraced 25 percent of the world's population. The United States was worried that Eurasia had plans to control the Middle East through Iran, and so it went on to support the Syrian uprising alongside Turkey and other conservative Arab regimes following President Al-Assad's refusal to break ties with Iran.<sup>94</sup>

Upon examination of the above two neo-realist explanations, we see that they are not sufficient to explain Turkey's policy change. Turkey has had several occasions to pressure Syria and Iran and counter the latter's influence in the region, starting with Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and the Western pressure on Iran to curb its nuclear program. But on the contrary, then Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer refused a US request to cancel a trip to Syria in 2005 following the assassination of Hariri, and in December 2007, Erdoğan facilitated a meeting between Al-Assad and then French President Nicolas Sarkozy who became the first Western leader to break the boycott of the Syrian president. Erdoğan even greeted Sarkozy alongside Al-Assad in the

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<sup>92</sup> Jamal Wakim, "End of Al-Assad, Or of Erdoğan? Turkey and the Syrian Uprising," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2014): 186.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 186.



Syrian capital.<sup>95</sup> What is more, Turkey played a mediating role in Iran's standoff with Western powers. It succeeded alongside Brazil to convince Iran to revive a UN-backed nuclear fuel swap deal in 2010, and in 2012 it hosted the P5 +1 talks with Iran while taking a neutral position to bring both sides closer. On these talks Davutoğlu said:

If you listen to all the parties to a conflict, of course, they will try to convince you of the merit of their case. Neutrality means listening in a neutral way. Objectivity means, after listening, telling one party, "You are wrong," and the other, "You are right." But you need to do so in the absence of the other side, not in front of them, in order to bring them closer.<sup>96</sup>

Also, as Mo'az stated, Turkey and Egypt tried not to "antagonize Iran unless their interests are in jeopardy." This shows Turkey's hesitancy to sever its ties with Iran given its dependence on Iranian gas supplies and the latter's leverage over the PKK through the Iranian and Syrian Kurds.<sup>97</sup> Davutoğlu confirmed in a 2008 paper the importance of Iranian gas to Turkey by stating, "as a growing economy and surrounded by energy resources, 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."<sup>98</sup>

Ziya Onis took a liberal approach in discussing Turkey's policy change. For Onis, the Arab Spring events presented Turkey with an ethical versus self-interest dilemma that could have been the reason behind its hesitation in taking a stance against the Syrian government in the early stages of the conflict. Turkey had to choose between a norm and an ethical foreign policy based on supporting

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<sup>95</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Into the Quagmire," 3-4.

<sup>96</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Mediation: Critical Reflections from the Field," *Middle East Policy* (Middle East Policy Council) XX, no. 1 (2013): 88.

<sup>97</sup> Ma'oz, "The "Arab Spring" and the New Geo-Strategic Environment," 17.

<sup>98</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007\*," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 91.

democratization on the one hand, and an interest-based policy to protect its economic and security interests in Syria on the other.<sup>99</sup> Its initial approach was to encourage reform through the existing regime and to play a mediator role in the Syrian conflict using its soft power and the political capital it had built with Syria. However, upon recognizing the limits of its ability to affect such reforms, it accomplished another U-Turn in its foreign policy toward Syria and started supporting the opposition groups.<sup>100</sup>

Turkish elite confirmed this liberal policy toward democratization. For Davutoğlu, Turkey decided to be on the side of democratic changes in the region and to make diplomatic efforts to effect peaceful transitions of power in the region since the first moments of the social movements in the Middle East.<sup>101</sup> Davutoğlu stated that for nine months since the start of the events, he had engaged in diplomatic efforts to encourage President Al-Assad to reform. In their last meeting, he had agreed with the Syrian president on a 14-point reform plan. However, he argued, Al-Assad's unwillingness to comply drove Turkey to support the Syrian people rather than the regime. Davutoğlu justified Turkey's choice by claiming that "the leaders are temporary and the people are eternal [and] the flow of history is on the side of the masses that have demanded their rights in the Middle East."<sup>102</sup>

This liberal, human security position is not sufficient to explain the change in Turkey's Syrian policy. If Turkey's policy change in Syria was solely based on liberal and humanitarian reasons, we would have expected it to apply the same policy in the

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<sup>99</sup> Onis, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (2012): 50.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 53-54.

<sup>101</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," *The International Spectator* 48, no. 2 (2013): 5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 6.

case of the Libyan uprising that had started earlier against Muammar Qaddafi. Turkey took a cautious approach vis-à-vis Libya and was reluctant to endorse a NATO led operation against Qaddafi due to its economic interests, investments and large manpower there. It only changed its Libyan policy when it could not remain outside the broad Western coalition that was forming against Qaddafi and so it changed its position toward the NATO coalition that eventually brought down Qaddafi's regime. But even with its changed policy, it "remained a reluctant partner and a rather passive player in the process."<sup>103</sup>

Following the Arab Spring, Turkey's challenge in terms of foreign policy was to ensure that its experience still represented a model or an inspiration to the Arab world. For Bulent Aras and Sevgi Akarcesme, Turkey's foreign policy could still cope with the challenges presented by the Arab Spring. Case in point: Arab elites and masses were still trying to imitate Turkey's political system, economic development and modernization, and Turkey can still use its previously acquired soft power capabilities to adapt to the new transformations in the region.<sup>104</sup> Saban Kardas also maintained that Turkey could still use its democratic, political and economic reforms in its engagement in the Arab world. Based on its 'central country' doctrine and the operational principle of its 'zero problem' policy- namely establishing a balance between security and freedom, Turkey is able to assist the newly formed Arab governments in capacity-building in the fields of "security sector reform, judiciary, media, health and education" that are essential to good governance and nation building.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Onis, "Turkey and the Arab Spring," 52.

<sup>104</sup> Bulent Aras and Sevgi Akarcesme, "Turkey and the Arab Spring," *International Journal* 67, no. 1 (2011-12): 48-49.

<sup>105</sup> Kardas, "From Zero Problems to Leading the Change," 7.

That said, Taspinar warned that the Turkish model was built on the foundations of secularism and, as such, it is not easily transferable to the Arab world. This model, Taspinar explained, was protected by a staunch secularist military who drew red lines for Turkey's Islamists and by a democratic political system, especially after the 1950 multi-party elections. Also, Political Islam in Turkey had a strong Sufi dimension that brought cultural, social and mystical dimensions to Islam as opposed to radicalism. Moreover, the Turkish model was supported by a developing economy built on exports, and by EU accession talks that were the driving force behind Turkey's modernization and reforms. The economic, political and secular factors driving the Turkish model are not all present in the Arab world.<sup>106</sup>

Christopher Phillips mentioned Turkey's hosting of the Syrian National (NLC) as well as the Free Syrian Army on its territories and its favoring the Muslim Brotherhood members of the SNC, which contributed to alienating the council's Kurds, Christians and secularist members. He stated that since 2009, Turkey has been trying to convince President Al-Assad to accommodate the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.<sup>107</sup> Other authors reiterated Turkey's leaning toward Syria's Muslim Brotherhood in political talks<sup>108</sup>, and its supporting and funding their Hamas faction alongside Qatar.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Taspinar, "The Turkish Model and the Arab Spring," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States* (2011): 11-12.

<sup>107</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Into the Quagmire," 6-7.

<sup>108</sup> Jackson Diehl, "LINES IN THE SAND: Assad Plays the Sectarian Card," *World Affairs* 175, no. 1 (2012): 11.

<sup>109</sup> Ribal Al-Assad, "SYRIA AND THE ARAB SPRING: The Middle East on the Verge of War," *India International Centre Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2012): 88-89.

The literature review discussed before did not show the role Political Islam played in the Turkish elites' role conception with respect to regime change in Syria. Rather, the role of Political Islam as a source of inspiration to Turkey's elites was examined in terms of championing general Islamic causes like Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, the literature review highlighted Turkey's roles of 'liberalizer', 'protector' and 'protector of the oppressed' in supporting societal demands in the Arab world, and its choice to back the people rather than the regime in Syria but without linking these roles to Political Islam.

## Chapter III

### Research Methodology and Theoretical Approach

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the role of Political Islam in the Turkish elite's role conception, and its impact on Turkey's decision to change its pro-Syrian government policy into one that actively seeks to topple President Al Assad's regime with the support of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist rebel groups.

I adopt a theory-guided qualitative research methodology based on the qualitative content analysis approach espoused by Jochen Gläser and Grit Laudel. Said approach "starts from a theoretically derived set of categories that remains modifiable in the number of categories... structure of categories ... and the possible nominal values that can be assigned to a dimension of a category."<sup>110</sup> My qualitative research consists of a case study of Turkey's foreign policy toward Syria following the Arab Spring events, and I adopt an interpretative approach to the case.

The theoretical foundation of my thesis is Role Theory. Early scholars that used role theory in foreign policy were based in American universities and they identified with cognitive approaches coming out of political psychology. On the other hand, European scholars used Role Theory in the context of the EU and of IR theories; however, and with the emergence of Constructivism, EU and IR scholars shifted their focus to structure and institutions.<sup>111</sup> I resort to both approaches in this

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<sup>110</sup> Jochen Gläser and Grit Laudel, "Life With and Without Coding: Two Methods for Early-Stage Data Analysis in Qualitative Research Aiming at Causal Explanations," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 14, no. 2 (2013): 22. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs130254>.

<sup>111</sup> Cameron G Thies, Marijke Breuning, "Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, (2012): 2.

thesis, building on the cognitive national role concepts of the AKP elites but also on the new national identity that the AKP elites forged with respect to Turkey's relations with the Arab world and with Syria.

In his 1970 seminal work, K.J. Holsti used the concepts of role in social science to define new national roles for the study of states' foreign policy behavior in the international system. Holsti moved away from the traditional polar world model built on national roles and functions of bloc leaders, allies, satellites and non-aligned states. The four concepts he imported from social behavior to analyze foreign policy included: (1) *role performance*, which encompassed the attitudes, decisions and actions governments take to implement (2) their self-defined *national role conceptions* or (3) the *role prescriptions* emanating, under varying circumstances, from the alter or external environment. The fourth concept was that actions always take place within (4) a *position*, that is, a system of role prescriptions.<sup>112</sup>

Holsti defined the national role conceptions of governments as:

the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their 'image' of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment.<sup>113</sup>

The above definition rests on the assumption that not only do policymakers take decisions on behalf of their governments but it is also their own cognitive definitions of the roles their governments should play that affect these decisions.

Some scholars have questioned the applicability of the Role Theory to states. But for Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot, role conceptions can also be applied to states and collectivities. They argued that on the one hand, "identities and role conceptions

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<sup>112</sup> Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 240.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 245-246.

are social phenomena that can be shared, even among most of the individuals within a state” and on the other, “individuals who make foreign policy decision in the name of states do so based on their ideas of what roles their states should play in the world and what roles are acceptable to their constituents.”<sup>114</sup>

In his model, Holsti made two assumptions. First, the concept of position (systems of role expectations) in a behavioral setting has more or less well defined functions, duties, rights and privileges and is difficult to apply in the context of foreign policy. He argued that since “nation states are multi-functional collectivities, operating within innumerable sets of bilateral and multilateral relationships in a comparatively unorganized milieu, it is difficult to apply the concept of position” and hence ‘status’ would form a better concept.<sup>115</sup> Second, foreign policy analysis generally “neglects the role prescriptions of the alter- that is, of the other states in the system.” The author assumed that the alter or external environment is constant and “that components units of the [international] system must rely primarily upon their own definition of interests as standards for action.” He reasoned that, “the fact of sovereignty implies that foreign policy decisions and actions (role performances) derive *primarily* from policymaker’s role conceptions, domestic needs and demands, and critical events or trends in the external environment.”<sup>116</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, I consider that both assumptions do not present a problem. Since 2002, Turkey’s foreign policy has worked within the context of Turkey’s relations with the US, accession talks and relations with the EU and

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<sup>114</sup> Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy, " 733.

<sup>115</sup> Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 242.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 243.



membership in NATO; however, Turkey has at times acted in its own interest, independently and differently from its allies' expectations. Case in point: Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer attended the funeral of president Hafez Al-Assad in Syria in June 2000 and refused a US request to cancel another trip to Syria in 2005 following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri.<sup>117</sup> Also, the Turkish parliament denied US troops the use of its territories in the 2003 invasion of Iraq<sup>118</sup> and Turkey was positively involved in the Iranian nuclear issue and has improved its relations with the Palestinian group Hamas.

That said the AKP elites were well aware of the role expectations their allies have placed on them, particularly the United States following the September 11 attacks. The United States saw Turkey as a model to the Arab world owing to its democratic system that is compatible with Islam and that respected religious freedom and the rule of law. The AKP elites avoided using the word 'model'; nonetheless, they believed, in the words of Erdoğan, that "Turkey could be a source of inspiration rather than a model for these countries."<sup>119</sup>

Regarding status, Turkish elites were conscious of the strong regional status their country has achieved as shown in the previous literature review. Such status was driven by Turkey's geopolitical, geocultural, domestic economic, political and democratic reforms, not to mention its growing soft power capabilities.

Since Holsti's seminal work, other scholars have used Role Theory based on the concept of identity. In 1992 Stephen G. Walker was first to discuss the role of identity in foreign policy while Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot in 1996 equated roles

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<sup>117</sup> Christopher Phillips, "Into the Quagmire," 4.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Owen Matthews, "Islamists Look to Turkey for Inspiration," *NewsWeek*, February 27, 2011, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/islamists-look-turkey-inspiration-68633>.

with identities<sup>120</sup>, arguing that roles provide individuals with a stable sense of identity.<sup>121</sup> Chafetz in 1996 argued that a state's development of specific roles depended on three conditions: First, material factors which include immutable domestic attributes like economic strength, population size and geography; second, interpretation of reality; and third, specific social situations such as "ethnicity, race, the traditions and values by which states govern themselves, interpretations of past and current experiences the nation has with other countries, and the social and economic pressures that the nation perceives from both its citizens and from other countries."<sup>122</sup> Lisebeth Aggestam also used role conceptions to bridge perceptions of identity with foreign policy. She argued that:

The politics of identity refers to a particular set of ideas about political community that policy-makers use and drawn on to mobilise a sense of cohesion and solidarity to legitimate the general thrust of foreign policy. As a consequence of its articulation and institutionalisation in the political culture, it may become internalised in the cognitive framework – or prism – through which foreign policy-makers interpret the political reality<sup>123</sup>

Similar to individuals occupying multiple role identities, states occupy different roles "within different international institutions and geographic areas", and the importance of a particular role depends on the accessibility and fit of the identity to a social setting.<sup>124</sup> For Davutoğlu, Turkey's domestic politics and its international position were going through a sensitive repositioning. The Kemalist elites' roles prior to the AKP were not aligned with the reality of the Turkish society or with its targets

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<sup>120</sup> Thies and Breuning, "Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations," 2.

<sup>121</sup> Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 733.

<sup>122</sup> Glenn Chafetz, "The Struggle for a National Identity in Post-Soviet Russia," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (1996-1997): 664-665.

<sup>123</sup> Lisbeth Aggestam, "Role Conceptions and the Politics of Identity in Foreign Policy," *Arena Centre for European Studies*, last modified November 9, 2010, accessed September 14, 2017, [http://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/publications/arena-working-papers/1994-2000/1999/99\\_08.html](http://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/publications/arena-working-papers/1994-2000/1999/99_08.html), 3.

<sup>124</sup> Chafetz, "The Struggle for a National Identity," 665.

and aspirations that are based on Turkey's historical Ottoman legacy. The Turkish society was trying to reintroduce itself and, as a result, was facing an identity crisis. Davutoğlu stressed on Turkey's role as a bridge between the East and the West where Turkey is seen as a European, Asian, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean state at the same time.<sup>125</sup> Turkey can have multiple identities and they don't need to be necessarily conflicting. In an interview Davutoğlu stated that as a Turk he sees himself a "European in Brussels, or Iraqi in Baghdad, Bosnian in Sarajevo or Samarkandi in Central Asia."<sup>126</sup> From a Middle Eastern perspective, this process of recreating a Turkish identity that Davutoğlu referred to was based on the Islamic religious and cultural heritages of the Ottoman Empire.

In this thesis, I present two independent variables and another dependent one. The independent variables are Political Islam as a role concept in the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy by the AKP's elites vis-à-vis the Syrian events,<sup>127</sup> and the 'audience' to the role enactment of the Turkish foreign policy. The performance of Turkey's foreign policy toward Syria will serve as the dependent variable.

I adopt the following definition of Political Islam throughout this thesis:

A form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on re-appropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Davutoğlu, *The Strategic Depth*, 115.

<sup>126</sup> Blake Hounshell, "Interview with Ahmet Davutoglu: Mr. 'Zero Problems'," *Foreign Policy*, last modified November 28, 2010, accessed August 12, 2017, [www.foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/28/mr-zero-problems/](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/28/mr-zero-problems/).

<sup>127</sup> Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 239. Holsti stated that "The perceptions, values, and attitudes of the actor occupying a position ... become the crucial independent variables in explaining role performance."

<sup>128</sup> Guilain Denoeux, "The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam," *Middle East Policy* IX, no. 2 (2002): 61.

Thies considered the ‘audience’ a crucial, albeit often neglected, aspect of Role Theory. It is the ‘audience’ that “establishes the consensual reality for the role...provides cues to guide the performer’s role enactment... engages in social reinforcement through positive and negative sanctions associated with the role enactment...and contributes to the maintenance of role behavior over time.”<sup>129</sup> In my thesis, the ‘audience’ will refer to the Syrian and Arab Islamic parties that have supported the Turkish foreign policy after the Arab Spring, and regime change in Syria.

### Data Collection and Analysis

For my analysis, I use as data sources different interviews, speeches, articles and discourses by the AKP party’s elites. I link the data in these sources with the research question by extracting content and building a database according to the categories of ‘Regional leader, ‘Defender of faith’ and ‘Liberation supporter’.<sup>130</sup>

Holsti defined these roles as follows:

‘Regional leader’ role:

The themes for this national role conception refer to duties or special responsibilities that a government perceives for itself in its relation to states in a particular region with which it identifies, or to cross-cutting subsystems such as international communist movements.<sup>131</sup>

‘Defender of the faith’ role:

Some governments view their foreign policy objectives and commitments in terms of defending value systems (rather than specified territories) from attack. Those who espouse the defender of the faith national role conception presumably undertake special responsibilities to guarantee ideological purity for a group of other states.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 11.

<sup>130</sup> Jochen Gläser and Grit Laudel, “Life With and Without Coding,” 10.

<sup>131</sup> Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 261.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 264.

‘Liberation supporter’ role:

The liberation supporter does not indicate formal responsibilities for organizing, leading, or physically supporting liberation movements abroad. Most statements supporting liberation movements appear routine and formal; they suggest rather unstructured and vague attitudes about actions required to enact the role conception.<sup>133</sup>

I study the roles above as they relate to Political Islam in Turkish foreign policy. I use trigger words and phrases that relate data to the above three categories. For example, words and phrases like ‘new regional order’, ‘failure of secularist regimes in Middle East’, and ‘Turkey’s responsibilities toward region’ could be trigger words for the ‘Regional Leader’ role. Words like ‘civilizational clash’, ‘Islamic heritage’, ‘Ottoman heritage’, and ‘Islamophobia’ are trigger words for ‘Defender of Faith role’ and phrases like ‘support to masses’ could be trigger words for ‘Liberation Supporter’ role. These words that appear in the data will be used to link that specific statement by Turkish elites to one or more of three categories above.

I gather as much press interviews as possible since these “contain the most spontaneous public material available” on leaders and they minimize the effect of ‘ghost writing.’”<sup>134</sup>

The analysis covers the discourses of the following leaders:

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey’s Prime Minister from March 2003 till August 2014, and President from that date to present.

Abdulla Gül, Turkey’s Prime Minister from November 2002 till March 2003, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs from March 2003 to August 2007. Gül then served as President of Turkey from August 2007 till August 2014.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 263.

<sup>134</sup> Margaret G. Hermann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1980): 14.

Ahmed Davutoğlu, Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs from May 2009 till August 2014, and Prime Minister from August 2014 till May 2016. From November 2002 till May 2009 Davutoğlu served as Chief Adviser to Turkey's then Prime Minister Erdoğan, and Ambassador-at-Large. Davutoğlu's academic career spans from 1983 till 2004.

Ali Babacan, Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs from August 2007 till May 2009

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs from August 2014 till August 2015, and then from November 2015 till present.

I also make use of interviews with Turkish ambassadors, including the 2016 video presentation of the Turkish Ambassador to Japan on the subject of Turkey and the Middle East after the Arab Spring. It is noteworthy that the above elites not only represent Turkey in its foreign affairs owing to their current positions but they all have been involved in Turkish foreign policy at different positions since the AKP's victory in 2002.

My research also includes the examination of articles, speeches and interviews of leaders of the Muslim Syrian Scholars Association (formed in Istanbul and includes Islamic Syrian scholars), the International Union of Muslim Scholars (includes the Syrian Scholars Association in its membership) and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. These constitute the second independent variable in my thesis, namely the 'audience'.

I also investigate Turkey's approach to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions to verify whether its position vis-à-vis the Syrian regime is aligned with its position on Tunisia and Egypt. My aim is to show that Turkey's support to the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Spring and its push for Political Islam extended beyond the

support of freedom fighters and rebels against autocratic regimes to a foreign policy based on a national role concept in which Political Islam constituted the solution to the loss of legitimacy of the Arab autocratic regimes. Such solution would create a new regional order based on a common religious and cultural foundation that transcended physical borders with Turkey as its major influencer.

### Limitations and Ethical Consideration

Some of the primary sources needed for the research are not available online, particularly interviews and speeches made in regional rallies and targeted toward domestic policies. Other sources are published in Turkish and cannot be translated due to the costs entailed and the time constraints. Also, among the available primary sources, some do not include a direct and clear reference to Political Islam as Turkey's elites have frequently shown a liberal and humanitarian tone in handling the Arab Spring events. As such, I perform a deeper search for primary sources that might not be available in the general media.

Another limitation is presented in the difficulty of conducting interviews, as many scholars are reticent about this topic, especially after the July 2016 attempted coup.

On another note, such work requires multiple raters for the sake of reliability. As I will singlehandedly analyze and classify the leaders' statements in my thesis, I perform at least two reviews of every speech or interview to ensure rating reliability.

From a personal perspective, I strongly believe that secularism is the solution to a multitude of problems in the Middle East. But while secularism in the Middle East has been associated with autocratic regimes since the 1950s, the current rise of fundamentalism in the region following the Arab Spring events is not a promising

alternative. However, as such work calls for objectivity and impartiality, I try to conduct a neutral, unbiased analysis of the role of Political Islam in Turkey's foreign policy toward Syria.

Finally, I comply with all IRB policies for conducting human research at Harvard (see <http://cuhs.harvard.edu/>).



## Chapter IV

### AKP's Foreign Policy Roles Toward Arab and Muslim Countries Before 2011

This thesis investigates the conditions that led Turkey to change its position toward Syria after 2011 and the role Political Islam played in the new Turkish foreign policy toward setting a new regional order.

The research findings are divided into two chapters. In this chapter IV, I use Role Theory to investigate three roles performed by Turkey prior to the Arab Spring events in 2011. The three roles are: 'Defender of faith', 'Regional leader', and 'Liberation supporter'. The sources I used were the AKP elites' foreign policy discourses toward Arab and Muslim countries in general and Syria in particular. This section shows that under the AKP, Turkey did not only defend Islam and its compatibility with democratic principles, but also played the role of 'Regional leader' by projecting the success of its economic and political reforms, being a Muslim-majority country, as a solution to the Muslim world. Turkey continued performing these two roles after 2011.

Also, prior to 2011 Turkey played the role of 'Liberation supporter' by championing Arab and Muslim causes especially in Palestine. After 2011 Turkey continued with this role and also extended it to support the Arab Spring revolts.

In chapter V, I investigate the AKP's post Arab Spring discourses toward the Arab countries in general and Syria in specific. This section shows that the AKP elites saw the Arab Spring as a geopolitical transformation that should lead to a new regional order. Turkey continued its foreign policy based on defending Islam, supporting Arab Spring movements and Islamic parties, projecting its economic and

political success as a Muslim-majority country, and forging close relationship with Egypt as the axis to the new regional order.

In chapter V I also investigate the ‘audience’ role performed by Syrian and Arab Islamic parties in supporting Turkey’s roles and foreign policy after 2011. As stated previously, the ‘audience’ in Role theory “establishes the consensual reality for the role...provides cues to guide the performer’s role enactment... engages in social reinforcement through positive and negative sanctions associated with the role enactment...and contributes to the maintenance of role behavior over time.”<sup>135</sup>

Throughout my research, I adopted the following definition of Political Islam as reference:

A form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on re-appropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition.<sup>136</sup>

It is impossible to separate the AKP’s foreign policy toward Syria, prior to the Arab Spring from its general Middle Eastern policy. At the same time, Turkey’s Middle Eastern foreign policy cannot be examined independently from the country’s geopolitical and geo-cultural repositioning conceived by the AKP’s elites and implemented since they came to power in 2002.

As such, and in light of the extensive data available for this period, I chose to limit my analysis to speeches and interviews conducted by the AKP elites during:

- Meetings of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation
- Meetings of the General Assembly of the United Nations
- Meetings with Western think tanks and institutions

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<sup>135</sup> Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 11.

<sup>136</sup> Denoeux, "The Forgotten Swamp," 61.

- Conferences on the Middle East and the peace process
- TV interviews

At the OIC meetings, the AKP elites had the opportunity to discuss reforms in the Islamic world and to demonstrate the success of the Turkish model to fifty-seven Islamic countries and, indirectly, to their populations. The UN General Assembly provided the AKP elites with a platform to address the whole world, while the meetings with Western think tanks and institutions were aimed at the Western elites.

Besides the aforementioned references, I reviewed Ahmet Davutoğlu's publications dating 1994 onwards. These included his 2001 book *Strategic Depth*<sup>137</sup> and three articles he authored as a scholar, namely *The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World [Dis]order*<sup>138</sup> (1994), *Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics: A Twentieth- Century Periodization*<sup>139</sup> (1999) and *Philosophical and Institutional Dimensions of Secularism: A Comparative Analysis*<sup>140</sup> (2000).

In his capacity as chief advisor since 2002 to then Prime Minister Erdoğan and as Turkey's foreign minister and prime minister later on, Davutoğlu was instrumental in re-orienting and opening new perspectives for Turkey's foreign policy, particularly toward the Arab and Muslim countries. That said, he was not alone in his early beliefs toward Western colonialism of Muslim countries, imposed secularism, and Arab autocratic regimes and Western support to them. Arab Islamists shared his views as

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<sup>137</sup> Davutoğlu, *The Strategic Depth*.

<sup>138</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Clash of Interests,".

<sup>139</sup> Davutoğlu, "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics: A Twentieth- Century Periodization," in *Border Crossing: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Fred Dallmayr (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999).

<sup>140</sup> Davutoğlu, "Philosophical and Constitutional Dimensions of Secularism: A Comparative Analysis," in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, ed. John Esposito and Azzam Tamimi (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2000).

apparent in the article authored by the Tunisian Islamic politician, Rachid Al-Ghannouchi, that I reviewed.

The reviewed data showed that Turkey's foreign policy rhetoric was mostly about general Middle Eastern and Muslim countries' policies on political reforms, economic development and regional integration. It also focused on the defense of Islam and its compatibility with democracy and modernity, Turkey's economic and political reforms as a model or inspiration to Muslim countries and the growing prejudice and polarization against Islam, and Muslim societies.

From a more specific perspective, the reconstruction and situation in Iraq and support to the Palestinian cause were central to Turkey's Middle East foreign policy prior to the Arab Spring. In 2003 Gül stated "the reconstruction of Iraq and the Middle East peace process are at the core of the efforts to bring stability to the region."<sup>141</sup>

Concerning Iraq, subjects like political restructuring, economic reconstruction and integrity and sovereignty of the country's territory have appeared in most of the AKP elites' political speeches since 2003. "In post-war Iraq, my Government's policy is based on our sincere desire to see a peaceful, secure and prosperous Iraq, with its territorial integrity intact,"<sup>142</sup> Gül declared in 2003, and in 2007 Davutoğlu stated that "Turkey has been one of the most influential actors involved in solving the question of Iraq's future, during and after the invasion of Iraq."<sup>143</sup> More recently, Turkish President Erdoğan expressed his refusal of the referendum on Kurdistan independence

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<sup>141</sup> Abdullah Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, (Ankara: T.C. Disisleri Bakanligi, 2007), 46, accessed on September 2, 2017, [www.mfa.gov.tr/data/BAKANLIK/BAKANLAR/AbdullahGül\\_kitap.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/BAKANLIK/BAKANLAR/AbdullahGül_kitap.pdf)

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>143</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007\*," 84.

planned for September 25<sup>th</sup> 2017 by stressing that this planned referendum undermined the territorial integrity of Iraq that Turkey wants to preserve.<sup>144</sup>

The same applies to the situation in Palestine where Turkey supported the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis toward a peace “based on Palestinian full statehood and Israel’s unqualified security.”<sup>145</sup> In 2008, at the 63<sup>rd</sup> General Session of the UN General Assembly, Gül reiterated this position and stated that it is “time to settle the conflicts of the Middle East, at the core of which lies the Palestinian question” and that Turkey supported all efforts to bring a solution to this central problem that will “alleviate the plight of the Palestinian people.”<sup>146</sup>

#### Defender of Faith Role

In this research, ‘Defender of faith’ will hold the same meaning as ‘Defender of Islam’ as a religion, and ‘Defender of Muslims and Islamic civilization’. As will be shown, such role was not limited to defending Islam against western colonization and secularization attempts in the twentieth century and support for autocratic regimes. Rather, it extended to defending Islam against western prejudices that equated it with violence as well as the belief that it was not compatible with democratic values, particularly after September 11. The AKP elites’ position on twentieth century colonialism and secularization, and autocratic regimes is important because after 2011

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<sup>144</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, interview by France 24 English, July 5, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAynEfst0Y>

<sup>145</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 32.

<sup>146</sup> Gül, "Address by H.E Mr. Abdullah Gül President of the President of the Republic of Turkey to the General Debate of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly," *Personal website of Mr. Abdullah Gül and his wife Mrs Hayrünisa Gül*, September 23, 2008, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.abdullahGül.gen.tr/speeches-statements/344/56405/adreb-by-he-mr-abdullah-Gül-president-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-turkey-to-thegeneral-debat.html>

the AKP elites saw the Arab Spring events as an opportunity to close this chapter in the history of the Arab countries.

The role of ‘Defender of faith’ is clearly apparent in Davutoğlu’s early writings, namely his article *The Clash of Interests*, published in his days as associate professor of political science at the International Islamic University in Malaysia. Said article re-examined the Post-Cold War theories of Fukuyama and of Huntington titled as *End of History*<sup>147</sup>, and *Clash of Civilizations*<sup>148</sup> respectively. Davutoğlu argued that the Bosnian crisis was the end of ‘the end of history’ and a reflection of “the imbalances of western civilization and the deformities of the existing world order.”<sup>149</sup> He rejected the way these two theories presented Islam as a threat to the universal values of liberalism, and flatly refused Fukuyama’s statement that “culture-in the form of resistance to the transformation of certain traditional values to those of democracy- can constitute an obstacle to democratization.”<sup>150</sup> Similarly, Gül equated the success of Turkey as a predominantly Muslim country in fulfilling the democratic criteria of, transparency, accountability, rule of law, gender equality, and good governance with “an anti-dote for the so-called ‘clash of civilizations!’.”<sup>151</sup>

Davutoğlu observed that following the fall of the Soviet Union, the dissolution of the pseudo-identities and pseudo-political fronts of the bipolar world created a vacuum that was filled with “historical/cultural identities which have become the core of political mobilization and inter-civilizational clash.” However, he cautioned, there

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<sup>147</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 418.

<sup>148</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22-49.

<sup>149</sup> Davutoğlu, “The Clash of Interests,” 108.

<sup>150</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 4, quoted in Davutoğlu, “The Clash of Interests,” 108.

<sup>151</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 428.

are other factors that affect current international politics, namely western “intra-civilizational competition...the geopolitical prioritization, [and] the trade war to control international political economy etc.”<sup>152</sup>

According to Davutoğlu, the “bloody borders of Islam are not merely due to historical hostilities or civilizational clashes”. They can also be attributed to the geographic location of the Muslim world where eight out of sixteen of the world’s most important choke points are under Muslim control, and to the geo-economic oil resources of the Muslim world. He argued that such geopolitical and geo-economic position has attracted intra-systemic competition to control this region.<sup>153</sup> This argument was reiterated in his book *The Strategic Depth* where he stated that the Middle East contained five of the most important maritime straits in the world as well as vast oil resources that have made it the center of strategic competition.<sup>154</sup>

Davutoğlu criticized Huntington’s theory for ignoring the fact that western civilization hegemonic paradigm marginalized the *Lebensraum* of non-western civilizations [including the Islamic civilization] and that the most destructive wars in history were intra-civilizational ones fought by competing Eurocentric western civilizations.<sup>155</sup> He was also critical of the different set of values by which the West dealt with democracy in parts of the non-Western world. Using the Algeria-Haiti paradox as an example, he demonstrated how the West supported a military intervention in 1992 against the democratic political process in Algeria that was

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<sup>152</sup> Davutoğlu, “The Clash of Interests,” 110.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 120-122.

<sup>154</sup> Davutoğlu, *The Strategic Depth*, 361-367.

<sup>155</sup> Davutoğlu, “The Clash of Interests,” 109.

eventually won by the Islamists, but a similar military intervention in Haiti created international sanctions and UN intervention.<sup>156</sup>

The AKP elites believed that presenting the Muslim world as a threat and an enemy encouraged oppressive tendencies in Muslim countries. The fear that democracy in the Muslim world might bring Islamists to power and instate anti-western regimes has benefited the ruling military and political elites in some Muslim countries who used this fear to cooperate with the systemic forces.<sup>157</sup> It is this same fear, coupled with western strategic interests in preserving the undemocratic regimes, that has led to the destruction of democracy in the Muslim world and to a deterioration of political legitimacy in the region. Davutoğlu accused the anti-Islam fundamentalism that developed in the West of being the “reason why the European community failed to be pluralistic and tolerant enough to fulfill its 20-year old promise to accept Turkey”<sup>158</sup> as a member state.

Rachid Al-Ghannouchi, co-founder of the Tunisian Islamic Party *Al-Nahda* (Renaissance), also criticized the West for its response to the cancellation of the Algerian elections in 1992 and for the double standard it exhibits. In his 1999 essay *Secularism In The Arab Maghreb*, Al-Ghannouchi observed that for the West, what matters is the end:

ethics and human rights are subservient to interests; values are only necessary if they will bring to power ‘liberals’ (as in Eastern Europe), but they are dispensable if the result is power for the genuine and sincere children of the land, and an end to the minority regimes that are the legacy of the colonial era...<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 122; BBC, *Algeria Profile- Timeline*, last modified July 13, 2017, accessed August 29, 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14118856](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14118856). In December 1991 the Islamic Salvation Front won 188 seats in the Algerian parliamentary elections and was posed to win an absolute majority in the second round. In January 1992 The National People's Assembly was dissolved by presidential decree apparently under pressure from the military leadership.

<sup>157</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Clash of Interests," 12.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Rachid Al-Ghannouchi, "Secularism in the Arab Maghreb," in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, ed. Esposito, John and Azzam Tamimi, (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2000), 103.



Davutoğlu's defense of Islam continued to show in his subsequent publications as a scholar, namely *Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics: A Twentieth- Century Periodization*. In this essay, he stated that the three major civilizational challenges the Muslim world faced throughout history were the Crusaders, the Mongol invasion and colonialism by Western powers. Whilst the first two challenges were military threats, Western colonialism presented a civilizational crisis in the Muslim world as it reshaped the basic parameters of the Islamic civilization, and led to a disharmony between "the surviving substance of traditional civilizations and the political and economic institutions which were created by the Leviathan of the colonial political system and the rising world economy."<sup>160</sup> Moreover, the author gave a periodization of Muslim politics during the twentieth century which he divided into four phases: (1) an era of semi-colonial dependency that lasted till the end of WWI; (2) an era of absolute dependency between the two wars; (3) an era of nation states formation after WWII that stretched till 1969; and (4) an era of civilizational revival and political confrontation following the formation of the Organization of Islamic Conference in 1969.<sup>161</sup>

The interwar period saw the end of traditional Muslim politics with the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate in 1924 and the marginalization of Muslims from the international system<sup>162</sup>. For Islamic scholar and founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen, Abdul Majeed Al-Zindani, the enemies of the Muslim nation

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<sup>160</sup> Davutoğlu, "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics," 90.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 95.

succeed in colonizing Muslim countries only after they conspired against the caliphate in Turkey after WWI.<sup>163</sup>

What is more, Western colonization placed Muslim colonies in a different political colonial system (British, French and Italian) and resulted in their loss of control over their economic resources: the colonial centers dictated the economic interaction between each colony and its colonial center and prevented any “rational relation among the colonized Muslim lands.”<sup>164</sup> Davutoğlu believed that “this intraregional alienation among Muslim societies is still one of the major barriers for the regional economic cooperation attempts.”<sup>165</sup> This would explain why economic interdependence among regional countries was a cornerstone of AKP’s economic foreign policy after 2002.

During the Foreign Ministers’ Meeting of Iraq's Neighboring Countries held in Istanbul in 2007, then Turkish President Abdullah Gül stated:

Undoubtedly, the creation of a political scheme based upon mutual confidence and the realization of economic-commercial interdependence in our region may not prove to be very easy. Such an endeavor foresees a political will by all the parties, based on a creative and constructive understanding and a consciousness of their responsibilities.<sup>166</sup>

In 2010, then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu announced:

principle of *zero problems toward neighbors* has been successfully implemented for the past seven years. Turkey’s relations with its neighbors now follow a more cooperative track. There is a developing economic interdependence between Turkey and its neighboring countries.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Abdulmajeed Al-Zindani, "Zindani Thanks Turkey and its 'Cavalryman'," *International Union of Muslim Scholars*, April 21, 2016, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=5627>, (Translation from Arabic is mine).

<sup>164</sup> Davutoğlu, "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics," 95.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>166</sup> Gül, "Speech Delivered by H.E. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey, on the Occasion of the Expanded Iraq's Neighboring Countries Foreign Ministers Meeting," *Personal website of Mr. Abdullah Gül and his wife Mrs Hayriinnisa Gül*, November 3, 2007, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.abdullahGul.gen.tr/speeches-statements/344/56518/speech-delivered-by-he-abdullah-Gul-president-of-the-republic-of-turkey-on-the-occasion-of-the-expan.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy," 5.

Also, during the interwar period, the role of Islam in political daily life was diminished with changes in the educational system and, most importantly, the replacement of the “central position of authentic Islamic institutions...by the newly adopted institutions of modernity established by the colonial and secular elites.”<sup>168</sup> The cultural relation between the state and Muslims also disappeared with the abolition of the Caliphate and the effects of colonialism, and the resulting vacuum was filled by Islamic social groups like the *Ikhwan al-Muslim* (Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt and *Jamaat al-Islami* in Pakistan.<sup>169</sup>

In the third era, the Muslim world adopted the Westphalian nation state system, and four interacting and contradicting forces determined the characteristics of the newly formed states, namely “traditional political culture, the process of modernization, the colonial heritage and the existing international order of bipolarity”. This reality created a crisis of legitimacy as it was difficult for the Muslims to reconcile the newly established territorial identities with the “traditional political imagination of the Muslim masses, which was based on the universal consciousness of being one *Ummah*.”<sup>170</sup> As a result of this socio-political crisis, two contradictory tendencies evolved in the Muslim World: the first was based on “secular nationalism, which tried to minimize the role of traditional/ Islamic concepts and values in the process of political legitimation”, and the second tried to re-conceptualize the Muslim polity and replaced the traditional political orders of ‘*Dar*

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<sup>168</sup> Davutoğlu, "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics," 96.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 98.

*al Islam* and millet system' with a new and modern political system such as the *Islamic state*.<sup>171</sup>

This era was also characterized by the emergence of three tendencies with respect to the role of religion in the political legitimization of the newly formed states: a tendency to consider religious identity as the backbone of political legitimacy, an example of which is Pakistan; a tendency to use religion and religious symbols as “a secondary instrument for the process of political legitimacy” as in the case of Egypt where “religious institutions such as *al-azhar* in particular and *ulama* in general were taken under the tightening control of the political regime after the military coup in 1952”; and a tendency to deprive religion of any legitimization value and to replace it by Arab nationalism as the “sole legitimizing ideology of the state”<sup>172</sup> like the *Baath* regimes in Syria and Iraq did.

In Tunisia, Al-Ghannouchi described the regime of former President Bourguiba (1956-1987) as the most radically secularist in the region. For Al-Ghannouchi, Bourguiba's model of secularism should have been known as ‘pseudo secularism’ because it did not aim at establishing “a separation between what is mundane and what is religious, or merely marginalising the role of religion,” but rather at controlling and monopolizing the institutions, symbols and interpretation of religion in society as a source of legitimacy. He quoted Bourguiba's successor President Ben Ali, who in 1992 declared that the “state has sole responsibility for religion.”<sup>173</sup> Al-Ghannouchi criticized the proponents of ‘pseudo secularism’ who believed that modernizing the state should not only be limited to science and

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 100-101.

<sup>173</sup> Al-Ghannouchi, "Secularism in the Arab Maghreb," 105.

knowledge but also to the adoption of the French model of modernization which calls for a break with the past.<sup>174</sup> “In this tortured century the modern Arab state has developed into a machine of repression whose mission is to strip society of its identity and uproot it from its history and civilizational links,” he commented.<sup>175</sup>

The fourth era witnessed “increasing tension between the power centers in the international system and several states and groups of states in the Muslim World.”<sup>176</sup> The Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1967, the tension between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus and the problems in Kashmir between Pakistan and India all led to increased common responses in the Muslim world. The sufferings of Muslim minorities and injustices of the international order were conducive to increased cooperation among Muslim countries as was apparent with the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Conference in 1969.<sup>177</sup>

The 1980s and 1990s of this era saw the rise in demands for democracy by Muslim masses driven by socio-economic changes and urbanization, the spread of social communication and a crisis of identity.<sup>178</sup> For Davutoğlu, the “process of democratization naturally leads to a reflection of social values in the political systems enabling socio-cultural mass movements to influence political structures” and “since Islam has been the fundamental force of social integration in the Muslim societies, this natural process of democracy has created a tension between secular political/bureaucratic elites and popular Islamic socio-cultural forces.”<sup>179</sup> His words do not

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>176</sup> Davutoğlu, "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics," 102.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 102-104.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

only defend Islam and Muslim democratic movements from secular/autocratic regimes, but they also highlight the importance of Islam as a social integration force central to any social and democratic movement in the Muslim world, hence their importance to this research as they were still holding true in the AKP elites' cognitive beliefs right before the Arab Spring.

In his essay, Davutoğlu highlighted the centrality of the issues of political legitimacy of autocratic regimes in the Muslim world and identity crisis due to western colonialism, imposition of secularism through the educational system, colonial institutions and secular ruling elites. His beliefs were shared by other Islamists like Al-Ghannouchi who returned to Tunisia from exile in January 2011 and led *Al-Nahda* to victory in the October election- the first to be held after the fall of President Ben Ali. This same publication also revealed Davutoğlu's position on the key role of Islam in the social and cultural life of Muslims:

The main factor of the universality of the Islamic civilization is the ontological consciousness which directly shapes individual human life regardless of ethnic and regional origin. Common cultural and political responses to colonialism and modernity in different parts of the Muslim World are the very indicators of this consciousness. The rise of Islamic identity and its socio-cultural reflections in the lands of the atheistic former Soviet Union confirms the impact of this ontological consciousness.<sup>180</sup>

On the issue of secularization and the question on why Islam is a secularization-resistant religion, Davutoğlu provided insight on the Muslim self-consciousness. He tackled two analytical levels of secularization in the sense of separations. The first level involved the separation of church and state "as organized and institutional forms of religious and political authorities"; however, this does not apply to Islam considering that, contrary to Christianity, there has never been an organized class of clergy throughout the history of Muslim societies. The second level

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<sup>180</sup> Davutoğlu , "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics." 111-112.

was that of ontological existence and the consciousness it brings in the political and social fields which is more appropriate to the Islamic civilization.<sup>181</sup>

For Davutoğlu, ontological proximity and particularization - the two pillars that support Western secularism - are alien to the Muslim ontological consciousness and self-perception because the “absolute monotheistic character of the Islamic belief system prevented ontological proximity and the emergence of any intermediary ontological category...”<sup>182</sup> In Islam, the concept of “*maratib al-mawjudat* (hierarchy of beings) and its relation to the Absolute Being (Allah) necessitates a direct ontological self-consciousness on the part of the individual human being independent from religious and socio-political authorities.”<sup>183</sup>

In the Muslim world, Davutoğlu opined, the “consequence of the Western challenge in the modern era was the break between ontological self-perception based on religious imagination and socio-political institutionalism based on a secular Western construct.” As a result, the “Muslim mind had to divorce the ontological and political level of existence.” It is the modernizing elites of the Muslim world that sacrificed the traditional assumptions of the ontological self and presented secularism “as the formulation of a new identity.”<sup>184</sup> The modernists failed to transform traditional self-perception because of the difficulty “in penetrating the individual Muslim’s self-perception”. Consequently, the “Islamic identity has revived using modern forms and structures”<sup>185</sup> that are socially, culturally and politically demonstrable.

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<sup>181</sup> Davutoğlu , "Philosophical and Constitutional Dimensions of Secularism," 176-177.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 189.

Davutoğlu used self-perception and identity as “two different states of self-consciousness.” But while identity can be given or imposed by some authority and thus needs two parties, he believed that self-perception is “purely a consciousness of individuality.” That said, he argued that an identity “might be transformed into a self-perception only if it fits the authentic internalized elements of the personality.”<sup>186</sup> The above idea appears throughout his 2001 book *Strategic Depth* and in the AKP’s elites’ speeches where the word ‘identity’ - resembling Turkey’s Islamic identity- became widely used. This shows that the Islamic identity the AKP is defending is a major element of their cognitive beliefs. In 2003, Gül stated that the AKP’s mission was “to prove that a Muslim society is capable of changing and renovating itself, attaining contemporary standards, while preserving its values, traditions and identity.”<sup>187</sup>

The role of ‘Defender of faith’ was not exclusively tackled by Davutoğlu, but appeared in the speeches of other AKP elites after 2002. The defense of Islam took two approaches: first, against western perceptions that Islam was a violent religion and second, against perceptions that Islam was not compatible with democracy. In a speech he delivered in 2003, Gül commented that the:

Muslim world suffers not only from its own shortcomings, but also from the prejudices in the western world. Many in the West seemed to be readily misled by those who claim to act in the name of Islam and resort to violence. Terrorism cannot be associated with any religion, culture or geography, but is a crime against humanity and must be treated as such.<sup>188</sup>

Then he stated the AKP’s mission is to:

prove that democracy, civil rights and liberties, respect for the rule of law, civil society, accountability, market economy, transparency, and gender equality can also be basics of a Muslim society. Our experience proves that traditional and spiritual values can be in perfect harmony with the contemporary standards of life and modernity.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>187</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 37.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.



Such statement highlight Gül's defense of Islam's compatibility with democracy, but also the AKP's regional role in presenting Turkey's success as a model or inspiration, as the AKP elites like to call it, for Muslim and Arab countries.

That said, the AKP's defense of Islam and their criticism of western prejudices should not be understood as a rejection of Turkey's relations with the EU, US, NATO or of its position in the western world. On the contrary, AKP elites have regularly stressed the fact that their country has always been part of Europe and their government prioritizes Turkey's full EU membership<sup>190</sup> even though it is a Muslim country and part of the East.<sup>191</sup>

#### Regional Leader Role

The role of 'Regional leader' that will be used in this thesis is limited to Turkey's role in pushing for political and economic reforms in the Muslim world and in promoting Political Islam as a solution to the loss of legitimacy of Arab regimes and the identity crisis in the Arab world, based on its success as an Islamist party in achieving similar reforms in Turkey.

Davutoğlu's publications before 2001 do not tackle any specific Turkish 'Regional leader' role in the Muslim world. However, his beliefs on the post-Cold War reemergence of traditional civilizations like the Islamic one and the importance of these civilizations to international politics are noticeable in his rejection of Fukuyama's emphasis on the intrinsically and universality of western values and political structure, and of Huntington's polarization of the 'West versus the rest'. He

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 577.

argued that Huntington's polarization is a "recrudescence of the spirit of Rudyard Kipling's fundamentalist colonialism, expressed in terms of the 'white man's burden' and is a natural corollary of what Arnold Toynbee described as 'egocentric illusion'."<sup>192</sup>

Davutoğlu called for an alternative analysis of the instabilities of the post-Cold War period based on the following components: "(i) the end of strategic stability; (ii) geopolitical and geoeconomic vacuum of power in international relations and international political economy; (iii) the emergence of authentic identities after the dissolution of the pseudo-fronts of the bipolarity; and (iv) intra-civilizational and intra-systemic competition."<sup>193</sup> The third component is particularly important to this research as it shows Davutoğlu's cognitive view on the reemergence of traditional civilizations like the Islamic one, and the importance of these civilizations to international politics that could no longer be solely based on a Western or Eurocentric perspective after the Cold War. For him, the "US may have to cooperate with non-Western countries- especially with the Muslim and Confucian states which presently control the sensitive geopolitical zone of the Rimland- against ultranationalist trends in Europe and Russia which have the strategic ambition of a Eurasian continental bloc."<sup>194</sup>

Davutoğlu rejected a solely Eurocentric understanding of world politics and the uncultural monopolism of western civilization that has led to the destruction of traditional civilizations.<sup>195</sup> He used such a rejection as a defense and support for his

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<sup>192</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Clash of Interests," 109-110.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 127.

idea of Islamic civilizational revival. His position on the support of western powers to undemocratic military and corrupt ruling elites in the Muslim world and the “polarization in Muslim countries between secular elites and Muslim masses which created political instabilities”<sup>196</sup> echoes his beliefs on the loss of legitimacy of Muslim autocratic regimes.

Davutoğlu also believed that the OIC was unable “to play a positive and efficient role in resolving the crises among Muslim countries” in spite of the increased cooperation among Muslim countries after it was formed. “The Muslim World still lacks a rational, efficient and operational mechanism of conflict resolution,”<sup>197</sup> he said. This would explain the AKP’s elites’ call after 2002 for a regional conflict resolutions mechanism as apparent in Gül’s 2007 statement:

I consider that, in order to match the future of the countries in the region with the expectations of the modern world, we need to get under way the internal dynamics in the Middle East region with the help of mechanisms developed within the region and by the regional governments.<sup>198</sup>

and in Davutoğlu’s explanation of the third principle of Turkey’s foreign policy in 2010:

The third operative principle [of Turkey’s foreign policy] is *proactive and pre-emptive diplomacy*, which aims to take measures before crises emerge and escalate to critical level. Turkey’s regional policy is based on security for all, high-level political dialogue, economic integration and interdependence, and multicultural coexistence.<sup>199</sup>

That said the AKP’s victory in the 2002 elections saw AKP elites become more vocal for a Turkish ‘Regional leader’ role in the Middle East. In a 2003 speech, Gül declared that it is “Turkey’s responsibility to work towards the goal of a good

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>197</sup> Davutoğlu, "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics," 104.

<sup>198</sup> Gül, "Speech Delivered by H.E. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey, on the Occasion of the Expanded Iraq's Neighboring Countries Foreign Ministers Meeting,".

<sup>199</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy," 5.

future for the Middle East. This is not only based on economic and political [matters]. There is also a humanitarian and moral imperative rooted in history.”<sup>200</sup> He believed that Turkey’s position as part of the East and the West allowed it to serve both worlds, and was sure that it would fulfill this historic role.<sup>201</sup>

According to Davutoğlu, “Turkey believes that it is possible to build an equitable and sustainable order which will benefit every country, every society and every individual.” But building such an order would require local and regional building blocs as well as a sense of “ownership of regional problems... and giving everyone a stake in cooperating with each other.”<sup>202</sup> The regional ownership of problems that Davutoğlu referred to meant a refusal of external imposition of solutions, and also a desire by Turkey to play a leader role in solving problems in its immediate regions from the Balkans to the Caucasus and the Middle East. For Turkey to play such a role it had to re-invent its identity to be seen as a European, Asian, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean state at the same time.<sup>203</sup>

In one of his key speeches delivered at the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Tehran on 28 May 2003- just a few days after the AKP formed its first governments under Prime Minister Erdoğan- Gül called upon Muslim countries to act with a refreshed vision and based on rational thinking with a view to put the Muslim world in order. Consequently, “good governance, transparency and accountability will reign, the fundamental rights and freedoms as well as gender equality are upheld, and there would be no place for

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<sup>200</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 32.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 577.

<sup>202</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Fostering a Culture of Harmony," *Russia in Global Affairs* 1, (April, 2010): 1.

<sup>203</sup> Davutoğlu, *The Strategic Depth*, 115.

blunting rhetoric and slogans,”<sup>204</sup> he continued. Gül encouraged political participation in Muslim societies and called for the eradication of “illiteracy, corruption, waste of human natural and material resources” as well as the promotion of “higher living standards” and the reduction in “income disparities and urban rural divide.”<sup>205</sup>

Several months later Gül discussed the Turkish experience in the field of political and economic reforms at the Business Forum of the OIC in Kuala Lumpur. The AKP’s mission he explained was “to prove that a Muslim society is capable of changing and renovating itself, attaining contemporary standards, while preserving its values, traditions and identity.”<sup>206</sup> The AKP government believed that Turkish people and other Muslim nations deserved and expected to have the “highest contemporary standards of democracy-fundamental freedoms, gender equality, free markets, civil society, transparency, good governance, rule of law and rational use of resources.”<sup>207</sup> For Gül, “the Turkish experience and many other efforts in the Muslim world in political, economic and social development rest on the belief that it is perfectly possible to advance a society in all fields while Islamic faith and culture continues to play an important role in people’s individual lives.”<sup>208</sup> Ali Sadruddin Al-Bayanouni<sup>209</sup>, then comptroller general of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, confirmed this position in an interview in 2006 when he stated:

The experience of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey deserves attention to draw lessons from it. Through solving people’s problems and easing their suffering, this party managed to top all parties by the votes of the Turkish people...the case of Turkey has kind of difference. It has been proved that in case fair and real elections are held in any Muslim

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<sup>204</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 528.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 540.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 539.

<sup>209</sup> Ali Sadruddin Al-Bayanouni was the general comptroller of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood from 1996 till July 2010. He was succeeded by Mohammed Riad Al Shaqfa.

country, the Islamic movement will top the political scene...<sup>210</sup>

Also in a 2008 interview Al-Bayanouni stated that the AKP represented a model for the Muslim Brotherhood and that while Turkey is not Syria, the AKP is the party the Brotherhood feel close to as it has Islamic references. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's (SMB) fundamental "political objective is to adjust the political problems of the people and to defend their interests: This is also what Islam advocates"<sup>211</sup> he stated.

Gül also challenged the title of the Forum 'Islam versus Modernisation', arguing the two terms were not contradictory. Case in point: the AKP's success rested on the ties with their grassroots and their closeness to the people. Gül maintained that the AKP's reform "experience has differed from the others by not relying only on the elites."<sup>212</sup>

Gül's objection to the use of 'Islam' and 'Modernisation' as contradictory terms, and his claim that the AKP's success differed from others by not relying only on the elites are key to this research as they show that the AKP elites were not only calling for reforms in the Muslim world but also introducing Muslims to their own feasible blueprint or model for reform. This regional leadership role played by the AKP in the form of their success in reforms would solve two long-standing negative perceptions in the Muslim world: the perception of 'modernisation' and that of 'elite imposed reforms.'

To understand Gül's first statement it is imperative to go back to Davutoğlu's

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<sup>210</sup> Al-Bayanouni, "Ali Sadruddin Bayanouni's Interview," *Ikhwanweb- The Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Website*, November 28, 2007, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=14723&ref=search.php>.

<sup>211</sup> Al-Bayanouni, "Syrie: Le Combat Des Freres Musulmans," *Politique Internationale*, No. 108 (Winter 2008): 5. (Translation from French is mine)

<sup>212</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 539-540.

1999 essay where he stated that “the modernisers in Turkey in the early decades of this century [twentieth century] adopted the process of modernization in the belief that it was an inevitable universal phenomenon, with secularisation as its rational essence.”<sup>213</sup> According to Davutoğlu the dichotomy of modernity and tradition in non-Western societies is “due to the fact that secularization has not been a natural and intrinsic process created by native social forces and legitimised by society’s symbols and values” and secularization “has been the product of the political will of an elite at the political centre.”<sup>214</sup> He opined that such tension between the elite ruling center and the traditional ruled periphery had two consequences. First, it presented the process of secularization as a “civilizational conversion by an elite that paints the discontinuity of de-traditionalisation as an inevitable part of the historical flow from tradition to modernity, from religion to secularism and from superstition to science.”<sup>215</sup> Second, secularization interpreted “as an absolute de-traditionalisation and de-historicisation is the absence of a collective rationality, which can only be reflected in surviving traditions.”<sup>216</sup>

In 2006, Gül said at the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah “if modernity is built upon rule of law; human rights; transparency; accountability, let me say just this: Again, these also are our values! Indeed, look at their history, and find them here, among us!”<sup>217</sup> His words discredited the idea of discontinuity in the historical flow of traditional civilizations and at the same time addressed the Muslim collective mind to show that these concepts existed in Islamic civilization. Gül

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<sup>213</sup> Davutoğlu , "Philosophical and Constitutional Dimensions of Secularism," 170.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>217</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 575.

refused modernity that is imposed by authoritarian means as it amounted to social engineering and this created resistance to it because it was seen as importing Western values.<sup>218</sup> This resistance was manifested in the Arab Spring events that overthrew authoritarian modernizers across and Arabs “are now seeking their own path commensurate with their values.”<sup>219</sup>

Also, in his 2013 speech at the closing session of the 38th Congress of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) Gül acknowledged “Islamic societies have made great contributions to the creation of such principles which we accept as universal today as human rights, justice, transparency and accountability even though these values were named differently at the time.” However, he blamed “the political and social corruption and economic retrogression in the Islamic societies”, colonization and “the social psychology and realpolitik which the ideological pressures of the Cold War created” for the alienation of Islamic societies from their own values.<sup>220</sup>

It should be noted that Turkey took two relatively different approaches to its ‘Regional leader’ role during the Bush and Obama’s administrations. In 2003 and in spite of Gül’s call for reforms in the Muslim world, Turkey did not pursue a fully independent Middle Eastern policy especially after the US invasion of Iraq and in light of US monopolism in regional politics. This trend is apparent in Gül’s statement in June 2003:

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<sup>218</sup> Gül, "Abdullah Gul: Egyptian Muslims should Not Fear Secularism," *Nathan Gardels, The World Post*, 2012, accessed December 2, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nathan-gardels/abdullah-gul-egyptian-mus\\_b\\_1545683.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nathan-gardels/abdullah-gul-egyptian-mus_b_1545683.html).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Gül, “H.E. President Abdullah Gül’s Address at the Closing Session of the 38th Congress of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH,” *Personal website of Mr. Abdullah Gül and his wife Mrs Hayrünnisa Gül*, May 24, 2013, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.abdullahGül.gen.tr/speeches-statements/344/86173/he-president-abdullah-Güls-addreb-at-the-closing-session-of-the-38th-congreb-of-the-international-fed.html>.



We will discuss with our colleagues in the region and with our American and European partners what we could do to muster regional and international support behind progress. We will explore ideas like:

A regional good neighbourliness charter or a code of conduct  
A regional security and cooperation process  
Regional trade liberalisation as President Bush proposed<sup>221</sup>

It is also evident in Turkey's support for President Bush and the G8's June 2004 Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative that aimed at supporting efforts for freedom, democracy and prosperity in the region. In 2004, Gül said "We encourage democratic reform and modernity in the Broader Middle East"<sup>222</sup> and in 2005, he reiterated his country's support to said initiative:

In fact, even before this G-8 initiative appeared on our agenda, I myself and other Turkish politicians have been urging Muslim countries to engage in a genuine reform process. We have been telling them that change is unavoidable and reform is the most effective way to manage it peacefully.<sup>223</sup>

The Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative was developed in light of an announcement by then President Bush in November 2003 that "[T]he United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. This strategy requires the same persistence and energy and idealism we have shown before. And it will yield the same results."<sup>224</sup> However, major Arab countries like Egypt and Saudi did not voice their support to the initiative and distanced themselves from it. Then Egyptian President Mubarak declared that external attempts to impose reform would lead to anarchy while the Saudi Crown Prince refused to attend the Tunis

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<sup>221</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 537.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 416.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>224</sup> The White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative," *US Department of State*, last modified June 9, 2004, accessed September 14, 2017, <https://20012009.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/fs/33380.htm>

Summit to discuss an Arab response to the proposal.<sup>225</sup>

Such hesitation on the part of major Arab countries to implement reforms could explain the tuning down of Turkish calls for reforms in the Muslim world. A year after his May 2003 speech, Gül maintained that reform is still high on Turkey's agenda; however, he added that:

reforms must be generated from within, not imposed, agenda and pace of reform are essentially a matter for each country, the needs and sensitivities of societies must direct the reform initiatives, reform is a gradual process, reform cannot be thought in isolation of international problems that preoccupy our hearts and minds, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iraq.<sup>226</sup>

And in 2005 he re-stressed that the agenda and pace of reform should be inherent to each country "since our socio-political structures are not identical, there exists no single remedy for all member states to apply. Therefore, it is up to every state in the second phase to determine their own course of reform in line with transparency, accountability and good governance."<sup>227</sup>

However, toward the end of Bush's presidency and the beginning of Obama's, we notice a shift in the 'Regional leadership' role toward a more assertive one. This could be explained by the AKP's increased confidence in their foreign policy after their July 2007 electoral victory, and by their belief that US monopolism in the Middle East was dwindling. Concerning the US-Turkish relations, Davutoğlu opined that the US can be a global power by establishing a system network of alliances- away from the Cold War containment policies- and by sharing regional responsibilities "with the regional powers and trying to create a consciousness that order is better and

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<sup>225</sup> Marina Ottaway, "the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: A Hollow Victory for the United States," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 22, 2008, Accessed September 14, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=21270>.

<sup>226</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 544.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 475.

more functional than chaos.”<sup>228</sup> As opposed to the post-September 11 world politics, he commented in 2010 that the Obama administration has created a new vision based on a multilateral international system where nation states met to “create solutions for the global political, cultural, and economic turmoil” and required cooperation between the United States and its allies in addressing regional and international matters.<sup>229</sup> Davutoğlu showed his plans for regional integration in a speech he delivered at the 133rd meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Arab League held in March 2010:

we are trying to help create a regional synergy through enhanced political dialogue, increased economic inter-dependence which would lead to economic integration, and intensified cultural interaction. In our endeavors, we neither seek prestige, nor self-interest. Our aim is to promote regional ownership and a unified regional approach. This is particularly important and essential to achieve viable solutions to ongoing problems in the Middle East that affect us all.”<sup>230</sup>

The economic interdependence and integration and cultural interaction discussed by Davutoğlu add an important economic and political dimension to this research. In the case of Syria, Davutoğlu said in a 2013 interview that Turkey has opened its borders to:

help develop a middle class in Syria through peaceful means. We were hoping in this manner that there would be change. Thus we never called for any rebellion or used the terminology of destabilization in any country, because we saw what had happened in Iraq. Imposed democracy can't solve the problems- change has to come from within.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Davutoğlu, "Speech Delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu at the 28th Annual Conference on US-Turkish Relations Organized by ATC-DEIK: “Turkey-US Relations: A Model Partnership, Global and Regional Dimensions” (Washington DC, 2 June 2009)," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, June 2, 2009, accessed September 12, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/minister\\_s-speech-at-the-28th-annual-conference-on-us-turkish-relations.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/minister_s-speech-at-the-28th-annual-conference-on-us-turkish-relations.en.mfa).

<sup>229</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* (2010): 1-2.

<sup>230</sup> Davutoğlu, "Address by Foreign Minister of Turkey H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu at the 133rd Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Member States of the Arab League, 3 March 2010, Cairo," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 3, 2010, accessed September 12, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-of-foreign-minister-of-turkey-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-Davutoğlu-at-the-133rd\\_-meeting-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-member-states-of-the-arab-league.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-of-foreign-minister-of-turkey-h_e_-ahmet-Davutoğlu-at-the-133rd_-meeting-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-member-states-of-the-arab-league.en.mfa).

<sup>231</sup> Michel Nawfal and Cengiz Çandar. "Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu; New Arab Legitimacy Or Regional Cold War?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 3 (2013): 99, doi:10.1525/jps.2013.42.3.92, <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/10.1525/jps.2013.42.3.92>.

Such statements were an attempt to show Syrians and other Arab Muslims the economical and political developments and reforms that a Muslim party like the AKP could achieve. Turkey was addressing the imagination of Arab Muslims living under autocratic regimes by presenting a model of modernity, development and political freedom that still respected traditional Islamic identity.

### Liberation Supporter Role

The AKP elites' 'Liberation supporter' role is very evident in Davutoğlu's defense of Muslim democratic movements of the late twentieth century. For Davutoğlu the 1991-1992 elections in Algeria and the civil war that broke out as a result of the cancellation of the elections showed the conflict between secular political/ bureaucratic elites and Islamic forces. Secular elites presented the calls for democratization as a 'fundamentalist threat' to the established system of nation-states. Al Ghannouchi considered that the cancellation of the elections showed the true nature of the "elitist, oppressive, Westernized, and corrupt state" as "an imperial legacy and remnant of colonialism in the land of Islam."<sup>232</sup> Prior to the Arab Spring, Turkey normalized its relations with most Arab regimes. In spite of their cognitive beliefs discussed earlier regarding Arab regimes, relations with countries like Syria improved tremendously.

The study of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and the roles the AKP elites played will not be complete without investigating Turkey's position toward the Palestinian cause. Turkey considered that "the question of Palestine continues to lie at

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<sup>232</sup> Al-Ghannouchi, "Secularism in the Arab Maghreb," 103.

the core of the problems in the Middle East”<sup>233</sup> and in its foreign policy toward this issue it played the three above roles simultaneously and without these roles causing any conflict in its performance.

In its ‘Regional leader’ role Turkey supported the Middle East Road Map and the two states solution between Israel and Palestine. In 2005 Gül stated “Turkey supports the two states vision of the Road Map; Israel and Palestine, living side by side at peace and within recognized borders. Although Turkey is not a member of the Quartet, it does not preclude us from providing our support to the peace process through taking part in its mechanisms.”<sup>234</sup> In its ‘Liberation supporter’ role Turkey called for the political, economical and social support of the Palestinians. At the opening ceremony of the Twenty Fourth Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC) meeting in 2008 Gül stated that:

The Palestine issue, which is among our political priorities, still awaits solution. The delayed resolution of the Palestinian issue results in the exacerbation of socio-economic problems of the Palestinian people. Therefore, I call upon all member countries to intensify their efforts to support development projects for the brotherly Palestinian people.<sup>235</sup>

The ‘Liberation supporter’ role also extended to support of Hamas. In 2006 Mohamed Nazzal, member of Hamas’s political bureau stated, following a meeting with Gül, that Turkey promised Hamas that it “would help and support the Palestinian people and will not associate itself to any move to punish them for their democratic

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<sup>233</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 166.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 476.

<sup>235</sup> Gül, “Inaugural Address of H.E. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey and Chairman of COMCEC to the Opening Ceremony of the Twenty Fourth COMCEC Meeting”, *Personal website of Mr. Abdullah Gül and his wife Mrs Hayrünnisa Gül*, October 23, 2008, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.abdullahGul.gen.tr/speeches-statements/344/56390/inaugural-address-of-he-abdullah-gul-president-of-the-republic-of-turkey-and-chairman-of-comcec-to-th.html>

choice.”<sup>236</sup> In 2010 Erdoğan extended similar support to Hamas when he stated that Hamas is a resistance movement elected by the Palestinian people and not a “terrorist movement”, and that it should be given the chance to rule after winning the elections. He also stated that the fate of Turkey and Palestine was inseparable.<sup>237</sup>

However, the AKP elites also looked at the Palestinian issue from an important religious perspective. In their ‘Defender of the faith’ role the AKP placed big importance on the issue of Jerusalem. In 2010 Erdoğan stated in response to Israeli settlements construction “If Jerusalem burns, the Middle East burns. If Jerusalem burns, the world burns, the ugly plans against Jerusalem will face a reaction not just from Muslims but also Christians and sympathetic Jews.”<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Mohamed Nazzal, “Exclusive Interview With Mohamed Nazzal,” *Ikhwanweb- The Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Website*, February 24, 2006, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=4743&ref=search.php>

<sup>237</sup> Ikhwanweb, “Erdoğan: Hamas is a resistance movement,” *Ikhwanweb - The Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Website*, June 5, 2010, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=25131&ref=search.php>

<sup>238</sup> Ikhwanweb, “Erdoğan: Aggression against Jerusalem hinders peace process,” *Ikhwanweb- The Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Website*, May 11, 2010, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=24730&ref=search.php>

## Chapter V

### AKP's Foreign Policy Roles Toward Syria and the Role of Islamic Parties after 2011

In chapter IV, I investigated the roles of 'Defender of faith', 'Regional leader' and 'Liberation supporter' played by Turkey in its foreign policy toward Arab and Muslim countries prior to 2011. Through these roles, Turkey not only defended Islam and its compatibility with democratic principles, but it also acted as a regional leader calling for reforms and projecting the success of its economic and political reforms – being a Muslim- majority country - as a solution to problems in the Muslim world. I also showed the AKP elites' beliefs on issues of colonialism, imposed secularism in the Arab World and maintenance of the post-Cold War status quo that kept autocratic regimes in power, highlighting the key role of such beliefs in modeling the AKP elites' perception of the Arab Spring after 2011.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the AKP elites saw the Arab Spring as an opportunity to close the chapter of colonialism, imposed secularism and Cold War in the region's history, in addition to exploring their quest for a new regional order.

During an interview held in March 2012, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood Comptroller General Mohammed Riad Al-Shaqfa<sup>239</sup> denied that Turkey had offered its support to the Syrian government following the Arab Spring events in exchange for four ministerial positions to the Muslim Brotherhood and that the Syrian government had accepted the Turkish offer but refused to include any key ministry in

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<sup>239</sup> Mohammed Riad Al-Shaqfa was elected in July 2010 in Istanbul as Comptroller General of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. He succeeded to Ali Sadreddine Al-Bayanouni and served till November 2014.

the deal.<sup>240</sup> Reports of the proposal appeared in the Lebanese newspaper Daily Star<sup>241</sup> and in the Dubai-based Al Arabiyah News Channel<sup>242</sup> in September 2011. Both media outlets based their news on Agence France Press reports that a Western diplomatic source in Damascus confirmed that in June 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan “offered, if Syrian President Bashar Assad ensured between a quarter and a third of ministers in his government were members of the Muslim Brotherhood, to make a commitment to use all his influence to end the rebellion.”<sup>243</sup> According to Al-Shaqfa, Davutoğlu denied making such a proposal.

The same articles also quoted a Syrian official who said that Davutoğlu had called for the return of the Muslim Brotherhood to Syria during his August 2011 trip to Damascus, and that President Al-Assad had accepted their return as individuals “but never as a party, because they have a religious foundation which is incompatible with Syria’s secular character.”<sup>244</sup> Moreover, both outlets reported that during a meeting between Al-Assad and a delegation representing Christian associations in the Middle East, the former “rejected that Ottomanism would replace Arabism, or that Ankara would become the decision-making center of the Arab world.” Al-Assad refused the participation of religious parties in Syrian politics as “this would allow the

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<sup>240</sup> Al-Shaqfa, "Self Defense," *The Majalla*, March 21, 2012, accessed November 23, 2017, <http://eng.majalla.com/2012/03/article55230039/self-defense>.

<sup>241</sup> The Daily Star, "Diplomats: Turkey Offered Syria Support if Brotherhood Get Posts," *The Daily Star*, last modified September 30, 2011, accessed November 23, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2011/Sep-30/150076-diplomats-turkey-offered-syria-support-if-brotherhood-get-posts.ashx>

<sup>242</sup> Al Arabiya with Agencies, "U.S. envoy’s Convoy Stoned; Turkey Offered Syria Support if Brotherhood Given Posts," *Al Arabiya News Channel*, last modified September 29, 2011, accessed November 23, 2017, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/09/29/169334.html>.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.



Muslim Brotherhood, which is headquartered in Ankara, to control the region.”<sup>245</sup>

While these reports cannot be confirmed, the turns the SMB made toward the Syrian government between January 2009 and May 2011 provide sufficient information on the efforts to bridge the gap between both sides with Turkey’s assistance.

On 7 January 2009, following Israel’s attacks on Gaza, the SMB issued a statement temporarily suspending “all its opposition activities against the Syrian regime in an attempt to channel all efforts and resources towards the main issue of the time”<sup>246</sup>, namely lending support to Gaza. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’s official English website *Ikhwanweb* reported that in January 2009, officials from the SMB traveled to Turkey seeking mediation for general amnesty and reconciliation between the movement and the Syrian government.<sup>247</sup> However, Zuheir Salim<sup>248</sup>, official spokesman of the SMB, denied any Turkish, Qatari or Iranian mediations stating that when asked if they wanted Turkish mediation, the SMB answered “you are mediating between the Syrian government and the Israelis, but we don’t think that the Syrians need mediation if there is a real will to provide the atmosphere that the resistance requires.”<sup>249</sup>

In an October 2012 interview with the *Ikhwanweb* website, the General Comptroller of the SMB confirmed that the Muslim Brotherhood had interacted “positively with all the initiatives carried out by the mediators even though all

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood Movement, "Statement from the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Syria," *The Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilization Studies- London*, January 7, 2009, accessed November 23, 2017, <http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/m-w/b-mawaqi-176.htm>.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Zuhair Salim is currently the spokesman of the SMB. He is also the director of the Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilization Studies in London ([www.asharqalarabi.org.uk](http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk)).

<sup>249</sup> Zuhair, “Clarification from the official spokesman of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria,” January 23, 2009, *The Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilizational Studies- London*, accessed November 24, 2017. <http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/m-w/b-mawaqi-181.htm>. (Translation from Arabic is mine).

mediation efforts were forestalled due to the government's intransigence and we no longer have direct contact with the ruling regime."<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, the SMB issued a statement on the second anniversary of the temporary suspension of opposition activities that "our decision to suspend the opposition activities encouraged some 'good seekers' to intervene and mediate to find a just solution to the suffering of the Syrian people... however everyone who made their initiatives ended up at the close gate of the regime."<sup>251</sup> While the statement did not specify the countries or the people who took such initiatives, the reference therein confirmed the mediation efforts made with the regime. On his part, Erdoğan, confirmed in a May 2011 interview with Charlie Rose that Turkey had had talks with Al-Assad dating back to as long as one year, about lifting the state of emergency in the country, releasing political prisoners, changing the election system and allowing the formation of political parties.<sup>252</sup> But, he continued, Al-Assad was late in taking these steps. The SMB restarted their opposition activities against the Syrian government on May 1, 2011.

One of the key milestones in the Syrian-Turkish relations was the last meeting held between Davutoğlu and Al-Assad in August 2011, with the former confirming that both parties had agreed on a 14-point plan to resolve pending issues. Davutoğlu's last message to the Syrian President was "If one day you clash with your own people

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<sup>250</sup> Ikhwanweb, "Syria's MB Controller: MB Welcomes Negotiations with Syrian Regime Despite Obstinacy," *Ikhwanweb, The Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Website*, October 26, 2010, accessed November 23, 2017, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=26911&ref=search.php>.

<sup>251</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood Movement, "Statement from the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria on the Occasion of the Second Anniversary of the Suspension of Opposition Activities," *The Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilization Studies- London*, January 7, 2011, accessed November 24, 2017, <http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/m-w/b-mawaqif-449.htm>. (Translation from Arabic is mine).

<sup>252</sup> Erdoğan, "Interview with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Charlie Rose*, May 11, 2011, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://charlierose.com/videos/15032>.

and say ‘either choose me or my people’ and force us to make a choice, we would not hesitate even for a moment to choose the people of Syria...”<sup>253</sup> The primary sources of this meeting and of previous meetings held between Al-Assad, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu are not available nor are any details of the Turkish plan or any indications of whether it included some kind of power-sharing proposal between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Syrian government; however, previous media reports as well as potential Turkish mediation efforts since 2009, the SMB’s declaration in 2008 that the AKP is the party the Brotherhood feel close to given its Islamic references<sup>254</sup> and the temporary suspension of SMB’s opposition to the Syrian government in January 2009 all supported the assumption that Turkey’s plan to Al-Assad prior to cutting ties with Syria in September 2011 included involving the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria’s political reforms. In January 2011, the SMB acknowledged that the Syrian regime’s support to the resistance against Israel is a positive point. The SMB were also ready to limit their demands from the Syrian government to humanitarian ones, namely repealing Law 49 of 1980 that made it a capital offense to be associated with the SMB, releasing political prisoners, allowing the return of SMB exiled members to Syria and revealing the fate of missing persons since the 1980s.<sup>255</sup>

The assumption that a plan including power-sharing with the Brotherhood was being devised was further supported by Davutoğlu’s statement to Al-Assad during one of their meetings. Davutoğlu had claimed that, today, a leader like Erdoğan who gets 50% of the votes in a competitive and multi-party election is stronger than a

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<sup>253</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," 6.

<sup>254</sup> Al-Bayanouni, "Syrie: Le Combat Des Freres Musulmans,".

<sup>255</sup> Al-Shaqfa, "Interview with the General Comproller of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria," *The Arab Orient Center for Strategic and Civilizations Studies*, January 16, 2011, accessed November 25, 2017, <http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/m-w/b-mawaqif-455.htm>

Middle Eastern leader who gets 95% or 99% with one candidate.<sup>256</sup> After all, the SMB were Syria's strongest opposition faction at the start of the Arab Spring events even though its main leaders were based in exile.

Turkey's actions after September 2011 also underlay the aforementioned assumption. Hillel Fradkin and Lewis Libby noted that with the fall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, "Erdoğan was quick to embrace as comrades the Muslim Brotherhood parties that moved into the power vacuum."<sup>257</sup> After his proposals to the Syrian regime were ignored, "Erdoğan tried to retake a leading role by hosting the Syrian National Council, a body claiming to represent the internal opposition against Assad, but also known to be dominated by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>258</sup>

For Raphaël Lefèvre, the Muslim Brotherhood's creation of the *Waad* party in July 2013 aimed to show their centrist position by including on a single platform a number of Muslim Brotherhood members, independent Islamists, other secular Sunnis and even some Christians and Alawis. It "helped place the leaders of the Syrian Brotherhood in the orbit of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AK Party," Lefèvre added.<sup>259</sup> The *Waad* figures were based mostly in Istanbul with a field office in Gaziantep on the

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<sup>256</sup> Davutoğlu, "Speech Entitled "Vision 2023: Turkey's Foreign Policy Objectives" Delivered by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the Turkey Investor Conference: The Road to 2023 Organized by Goldman Sachs (London, 22.11.2011)," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, November 22, 2011, accessed November 22, 2017, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-vision-2023-turkey-s-foreign-policy-objectives-delivered-by-h-e-ahmet-davutoglu-minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa>

<sup>257</sup> Hillel Fradkin and Lewis Libby, "Erdoğan's Grand Vision: Rise and Decline," *World Affairs* 175, no. 6 (2013): 46.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Raphaël Lefèvre, "Islamism within a Civil War: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's Struggle for Survival," *Brookings Institute: Rethinking Political Islam Series* (2015): 4.

Syrian-Turkish border and enjoyed “close ties to the Turkish government and they constantly speak of their admiration for the ‘Turkish miracle’.”<sup>260</sup>

It is important to look at Turkey’s support to the SMB through the geopolitical lens used by the AKP to examine the Arab Spring events in Syria and elsewhere. Before 2011, Gül stated that his country’s position allowed it to serve both the East and the West, and its responsibility toward a better future for the Middle East was not only based on economic and political matters but also on humanitarian and historical ones.<sup>261</sup> For his part, Davutoğlu, claimed that Turkey’s aim to build an “an equitable and sustainable order which will benefit every country, every society and every individual” required local and regional building blocs as well as a sense of “ownership of regional problems.”<sup>262</sup> Davutoğlu’s position reflected Turkey’s refusal of external imposition of solutions on the one hand and its goal to play a leader role in solving problems in its immediate regions on the other.

Following 2011, Turkey did not only see the Arab Spring as a call by Arab masses for freedom and democracy but also as a natural development in the course of history. In October 2011, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it “expects the Syrian Administration to realize as soon as possible that the acts of violence designed to suppress the opposition in Syria ... cannot turn back the course of history,”<sup>263</sup> and in February 2012, it called the international community to “stand with the Syrian people and be on the right side of history at these challenges being

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>261</sup> Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, 32.

<sup>262</sup> Davutoğlu, "Fostering a Culture of Harmony," 1.

<sup>263</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Turkey, "No: 227, 8 October 2011, Press Release regarding the Latest Attacks on the Syrian Opposition Figures," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, October 8, 2011, accessed September 27, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_227\\_-7-october-2011\\_-press-release-regarding-the-latest-attacks-on-the-syrian-opposition-figures.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_227_-7-october-2011_-press-release-regarding-the-latest-attacks-on-the-syrian-opposition-figures.en.mfa).

faced in Syria.”<sup>264</sup> The ministry’s references to the ‘course of history’ and ‘right side of history’ were echoed by AKP elites.

For to the AKP elites, the Arab Spring represented a geopolitical shift as significant as the end of the Cold War and the September 11 attacks. In the words of Davutoğlu, “three earthquakes have shaken the main pillars of the global system – security, economy and politics – over the past two decades...The fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11 and, most recently, the Arab Spring and the euro crisis...”<sup>265</sup> That said, Turkey was on the winning side of the transformations that took place prior to the Arab Spring as it was a member of NATO that won the Cold War against the Warsaw Pact even though its foreign policy in the 1990s was not yet proactive. Moreover, while security-based policies took priority worldwide after 9/11, Turkey concentrated on deepening democratization domestically and adopted a multidimensional and proactive foreign policy regionally and internationally.<sup>266</sup> Economically the Turkish economy grew at an annual average rate of 7.5 per cent during the past seven years excluding 2009, the year of global crisis, but even then, foreign direct investments of US\$ 8.5 billion flowed into the country.<sup>267</sup>

According to the AKP elites, the Arab Spring brought the end of the Cold War in the Middle East because Arab regimes undergoing change were Cold War

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<sup>264</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Turkey, "No: 38, 4 February 2012, Press Release regarding the UN Security Council being Unable to Reach a Decision on Syria," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, February 4, 2012, accessed September 27, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-38\\_-4-february-2012\\_-press-release-regarding-the-un-security-council-being-unable-to-reach-a-decision-on-syria.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-38_-4-february-2012_-press-release-regarding-the-un-security-council-being-unable-to-reach-a-decision-on-syria.en.mfa).

<sup>265</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," 1.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>267</sup> Gül, "Speech By H.E. President Abdullah Gül of the Republic of Turkey at Columbia University World Leaders Forum," *Personal website of Mr. Abdullah Gül and his wife Mrs Hayrünnisa Gül*, September 24, 2010, accessed November 19, 2017, <http://www.abdullahGul.gen.tr/speeches-statements/344/77362/speech-by-he-president-abdullah-Gül-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-columbia-university-world-leaders-f.html>.

structures. The AKP elites did not see a “large difference between the demands of the masses that rose up against the Ceausescu regime in Romania and those that rose up against the Assad regime in Syria.” For Turkey, “the flow of history is on the side of the masses that have demanded their rights in the Middle East.”<sup>268</sup> In March 2011, at the Sixth Al Jazeera Forum in Doha, Davutoğlu stated that one has to see the Arab Spring events “as natural reflections of the natural flow of history...because there was a need for change.”<sup>269</sup> Regional politics in the last century saw two abnormalities, colonialism and the Cold War, he said. Colonialism “in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, divided the region into colonial entities and separated the natural links between tribes and communities.” As a result, historical but also economic links were cut between cities like Damascus and Baghdad.<sup>270</sup>

The Cold War divided coexisting countries like Turkey and Syria that became two blocs; but with the Arab Spring, it was “time to naturalise the flow of history.”<sup>271</sup> The AKP elites considered this process as overdue since the 1990s but it was delayed as some countries believed “that Arab societies do not deserve democracies”<sup>272</sup> and preferred to maintain the status quo in the Arab World to prevent Islamic radicalization. The United States and the EU deemed post-Cold War democratic movements in the Middle East as risky elements: democratic movements in countries like Algeria, Tunisia and Jordan were seen back then as potential threats, and countries that supported democratization in the Balkans failed to support the same

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<sup>268</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," 5.

<sup>269</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Sixth Al Jazeera Forum," *Al Jazeera*, March 13, 2011, accessed October 7, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/03/20113131351569612.html>

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

process in the Middle East. As a result, Arab autocratic regimes projected themselves to the West as the barrier to Islamic radicalization.<sup>273</sup>

Davutoğlu believed that, “the past was the abnormality [and] the present change is a natural flow of the history.” He saw “a need to reconnect societies, communities, tribes, ethnicities, sects in our region”<sup>274</sup> and move back history in the Middle East and Africa to its natural course.<sup>275</sup> Davutoglu’s statements echo the same beliefs expressed in his aforementioned articles from 1994, 1999 and 2000, thus reflecting the continuity in the AKP’s political and social mindset but also confirming its cognitive belief of the necessity, nay the inevitability of change that would create a new regional order which would reconnect people.

In an interview in 2013, Davutoğlu reiterated Turkey’s geopolitical look at the Arab Spring events:

The twentieth century was a parenthesis in our long history, and that now we have to close this parenthesis. It was an aberration based on two phenomena: first, colonialism, with the Sykes-Picot maps; and second, the Cold War and the new nation-states that emerged when it ended. Because of these new states and borders, natural zones were alienated from each other: traditionally Mosul and Aleppo were very closely linked to each other and had close ties not only with Baghdad and Damascus but also with cities on the other side of the border of what became Turkey— Aleppo with Ayntab, Mosul with Diyarbakir and Mardin.<sup>276</sup>

Likewise, the Turkish Ambassador to Japan Ahmet Bülent Meriç made reference to the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 2015:

after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire...following the First World War, the borders were drawn according to the interests of the colonial powers of the time...[and] when we talk about Syria or Iraq, there was no nationhood by the name of Iraq or Syria [and] whereas in

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<sup>273</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkish Foreign Minister at University of Chicago," *University of Chicago*, June 19, 2012, accessed October 9, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkFvUmxo8LA>.

<sup>274</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Sixth Al Jazeera Forum,".

<sup>275</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," 5-6.

<sup>276</sup> Nawfal and Çandar. "Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu; New Arab Legitimacy Or Regional Cold War?" 96-97.



Europe the nations created their nation states, in the Middle East, the states created their nations.<sup>277</sup>

The idea that the twentieth century was a parenthesis in the Muslim and Arab World's history that should be closed, and the reference to the Sykes-Picot Agreement are both key to this thesis: First, colonialism in the twentieth century brought political and economic division and separation of Muslim countries that were traditionally interconnected under the Ottoman Empire. Second, the Sykes-Picot Agreement that divided the territories of the Ottoman Empire in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine between the United Kingdom and France created new states and borders between cities and people that once coexisted. The AKP elites saw the Arab Spring as a geopolitical transformation that closed the period of colonialism along with the divisions it entailed and brought back the Arab World to the natural flow of history represented by the democratic changes that should have happened after 1990.

For Turkey, such geopolitical transformation has led to the quest for a new regional order but while this new regional order would respect nation states and existing borders, it is guaranteed to revive a "long tradition (qadim) in a global way: That people should mix." Davutoğlu drew a parallel between the 1975 Helsinki Agreement that respected the existing borders in Europe but made interaction between the Warsaw Pact and NATO countries possible, and Turkey's vision for a new regional order in the Middle East. The Helsinki Agreement - that later became the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe - constituted new security architecture for Europe and was the first step toward ending the Cold War. Meanwhile, in the new Middle Eastern regional order, all countries would be equal

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<sup>277</sup> Ahmet B Meriç, "The Current Dynamics in the Middle East and the Turkish Viewpoint," *Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan*, April 2, 2015, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWzaPUMCs8>.

and “territorial divisions meaningless through economic interdependence, cultural relations, [and] the movement of human beings.”<sup>278</sup> In addition to economic integration, the new regional order was envisioned as “politically well structured, based on legitimacy and a common security zone.”<sup>279</sup> Meriç reiterated the same vision when he stated that when Turkey supported the Arab Spring events, it did so on the premise that “democracy will just come to this region...people will become more connected with each other [and] the borders [that] are artificially drawn would just become loose borders and there would be cooperation between the regional countries like the European Union...”<sup>280</sup>

Davutoğlu stressed that this new regional order was achievable as people in the region lived together in harmony in the past. He saw the idea as realistic “because natural borders, and the normalization of borders, is realistic.” That said, the new regional order “cannot be a purely Arab union, because there are non-Arab peoples—Turks, Kurds, Iranians. And it can’t be purely Islamic, because there are Christians in Egypt, Turkey, Syria, everywhere in the region. And it will not be Ottomanism, because Ottomanism is of the past...”<sup>281</sup>

Turkey’s position against the new regional order being a purely Arab union stems from the fact that the presence of Turks, Kurds, Iranians and other minorities in the region makes it difficult for the creation of a regional order based on a pan-Arab union similar to what Nasserism and Baathism tried to achieve between Arab

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<sup>278</sup> Nawfal and Çandar. "Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu" 97-98.

<sup>279</sup> Davutoğlu, "Speech Delivered by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, in the University of London School of Economics and Political Science, 7 March 2013, London," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 7, 2013, accessed November 22, 2017, [www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.en.mfa?e02fbae4-66f5-4813-96b7-40986c71f171](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.en.mfa?e02fbae4-66f5-4813-96b7-40986c71f171).

<sup>280</sup> Meriç, "The Current Dynamics in the Middle East and the Turkish Viewpoint,".

<sup>281</sup> Nawfal and Çandar. "Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu," 98.

countries. The AKP elites believed that the ideological and strategic frameworks of Nasserism and Baathism that ruled the Arab World during the Cold War have lost their values and symbols today<sup>282</sup> and so the Arab World requires a new order.

And while the AKP elites are right in their belief that the new regional order cannot be purely Islamic, the possibility of Political Islam being the uniting factor in such regional order while preserving the rights of non-Muslim minorities is not to be excluded.

Lastly, Davutoğlu's viewpoint on Ottomanism being archaic is justified by the fact that Turkey cannot afford to play the role of a hegemon in the Arab World in spite of its military and economic capabilities compared to the Arab countries. Case in point: the 2003 US invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq and the financial, political and military costs they entailed.

Turkey adopted a multi-pronged approach in its quest for a new regional order where it would play a leading role and Political Islam would be the uniting factor. First, it supported the Arab masses in general and Syrian rebels and refugees in particular. Such support was not purely based on humanitarian reasons but also stemmed from Turkey's cognitive belief in its role in supporting liberation movements and its historic duty toward the Arab World. Second, it backed Islamic parties, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, in the countries undergoing transformation through its policy of defending Islam and its compatibility with democracy. The aim was to project itself as an inspiration to Arab Spring countries but also to show the West that Islamic parties, can also achieve economic and political success in their respective countries following Turkey's experience as a Muslim-majority country.

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<sup>282</sup> Davutoğlu, *The Strategic Depth*, 399.

Third, it supported the change in Egypt as it believed in the joint power of the two countries to lead the new regional order with Egypt led by an Islamic party close to the AKP.

### Support to Syrian and Arab Masses

On the general transformations in Arab Spring countries, the AKP elites believed that “every step toward democracy will make these countries more reliable partners of the international community while meeting the legitimate expectations of their own people.”<sup>283</sup> In their opinion, Turkey “made a strategic decision to stay on the right side of the history together with many members of the international community.”<sup>284</sup> Gül reconfirmed Turkey’s position in 2013 by stating that “governments rise to power through elections but maintain it only through the consent of the people” which grants popular legitimacy.<sup>285</sup> “The ideology of any government matters but so much that it does not contradict public reason,” he said, and “When the ideology of political powers clashes with the common sense of the peoples the winner is always the latter.”<sup>286</sup> Gül put Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution that erupted in 2011 in the same “place in history as did the first democratic wave taking place in

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<sup>283</sup> Gül, "Address by H.E. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey, at Chicago Council on Global Affairs," *Personal website of Mr. Abdullah Gül and his wife Mrs Hayrünnisa Gül*, May 22, 2012, accessed October 7, 2017, <http://www.abdullahGül.gen.tr/speeches-statements/344/83065/addreb-by-he-abdullah-Gül-president-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-chicago-council-on-global-affairs.html>.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Gül, "A Conversation with Abdullah Gül," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 26, 2013, accessed October 7 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-abdullah-Gül-1>.

Western Europe and America [1848] and the second one experienced in Eastern Europe and Latin America after 1989.”<sup>287</sup>

It is noteworthy that Turkey’s spatial reaction to the events differed from one country to another. For instance, it assumed its position against Tunisia’s President Ben Ali within one day while it took a stance against Egyptian President Mubarak, after a couple of weeks. On the other hand, it took Turkey much more time to formulate its position vis-à-vis Syria. According to Davutoğlu, “Turkey advised President Bashar Al-Assad for nine months to make reforms, and spent a great deal of energy to persuade him to abandon violence against his people.”<sup>288</sup>

In April 2011, Turkey welcomed the statements made by President Al-Assad to “the effect that the legitimate aspirations of the people would be accommodated and that a series of reforms would be put into practice to this end”, and it informed Syria of its readiness to support these reforms.<sup>289</sup> However, by July 2011, Turkey had slightly changed its tone as it questioned the intentions of the Syrian administration. It warned that security “operations and violence do not achieve solutions” and called “the Syrian administration to see this reality.”<sup>290</sup> As time passed, Turkey took a more assertive stance, asking the Syrian government to “pave the way for the democratic

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<sup>287</sup> Gül, "Address by H.E. Abdullah Gül to the Founding Assembly of Tunisia," *Personal website of Mr. Abdullah Gül and his wife Mrs Hayrünnisa Gül*, March 8, 2012, accessed November 22, 2017, <http://www.abdullahGul.gen.tr/speeches-statements/344/82302/addreb-by-he-abdullah-Gül -to-the-founding-abembly-of-tunisia.html>.

<sup>288</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy: Objectives, Challenges and Prospects," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 6 (2013): 869.

<sup>289</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Turkey, "No: 111, 24 April 2011, Press Release regarding the Events that Took Place in Syria on Friday, 24 April 2011," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, April 22, 2011, accessed September 26, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_111\\_-24-april-2011\\_-press-release-regarding-the-events-that-took-place-in-syria-on-friday\\_-22-april-2011.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_111_-24-april-2011_-press-release-regarding-the-events-that-took-place-in-syria-on-friday_-22-april-2011.en.mfa).

<sup>290</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Turkey, "No: 178, 31 July 2011, Press Release regarding the Recent Developments in Syria," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, July 31, 2011, accessed September 26, 2017, " [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_178\\_-31-july-2011\\_-press-release-regarding-the-recent-developments-in-syria.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_178_-31-july-2011_-press-release-regarding-the-recent-developments-in-syria.en.mfa).

transformation which is now inevitable in the country...” and warned that “no administration can emerge victorious from a fight against its people.”<sup>291</sup> This position culminated in then Prime Minister Erdoğan’s call end of November 2011 for President Al-Assad to step down. “Fighting your own people until the death is not heroism, it’s cowardice. If you want to see someone who fights his people to the death, look at Nazi Germany, look at Hitler, look at Mussolini,” Erdoğan said to Al-Assad. “If you cannot learn a lesson from them, look at the killed Libyan leader who turned his guns on his own people and only 32 days ago used the same expressions as you.”<sup>292</sup>

Turkey lent direct support to “the people of Syria in their endeavors for a democratic, prosperous and stable Syria and to the “establishment of a free and democratic system, which constitutionally safeguards the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Syrian people on the basis of equality, regardless of their ethnic, religious or sectarian backgrounds.”<sup>293</sup> Such liberal position in backing Arab Spring countries was also evident in the AKP’s foreign policy toward Tunisia and Egypt. In 2013, Gül called the international community to take sides with the regional transformations in the Arab world and called to the defense and support of the “fragile progress in the region including Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.” He stated that “Turkey immediately extended its support to the Egyptian people in their pursuit of democracy

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<sup>291</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Turkey, "no: 255, 13 November, Press Release regarding the Decision Taken by the Arab League about Syria on 12 November," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, November 13, 2011, accessed September 26, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-255\\_-13-november\\_-press-release-regarding-the-decision-taken-by-the-arab-league-about-syria-on-12-november.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-255_-13-november_-press-release-regarding-the-decision-taken-by-the-arab-league-about-syria-on-12-november.en.mfa).

<sup>292</sup> Jonathon Burch, "Turkish PM Calls on Syria's Assad to Quit" Reuters, *Reuters*, November 22, 2011, accessed September 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-syria/turkish-pm-calls-on-syrias-assad-to-quit-idUSTRE7AL0WJ20111122>.

<sup>293</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Turkey, "Relations between Turkey-Syria," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2017, accessed December 24, 2017, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey%E2%80%93syria.en.mfa>.

and freedom... and the democratic process [following the ousting of President Mursi] must be restored to represent the free will of the people.”<sup>294</sup>

Besides supporting political change in Syria, the AKP elites addressed the humanitarian side of the conflict by stressing that throughout its history, Turkey “has been a place of refuge for many people and groups of people from different parts of the world...[and] this tradition, undoubtedly, is especially valid for our Syrian brothers...”<sup>295</sup> In the early stages of the conflict, Davutoğlu stated:

Two and a half million people have been internally displaced. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have sought shelter in neighboring countries. Turkey alone is hosting over 120 thousand of them in camps, plus over 70 thousand outside the camps. It is our duty and responsibility to help our Syrian brothers and sisters in need. It is a challenging responsibility with great cost. But no matter how difficult the challenge is, we will continue with our open door policy and stand by our brothers.<sup>296</sup>

Moreover, Erdoğan stated in 2014:

Now in my country there are more than seven hundred thousand refugees. With our open door policy we receive our brothers through the border. We want to host them as much as our means allow us. They are our brothers. We cannot but extend a helping hand to them. We will do whatever we can.<sup>297</sup>

For their part, the SMB expressed appreciation for Turkey’s support of the Syrian revolution. In the words of Ali Al-Bayanouni:

Turkey has been the most supportive, both materially and morally, in the revolution. They continue to support the revolution without an agenda. They have suffered difficulties inside their own borders as a result, but they continue to help Syria. They recognize the danger

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<sup>294</sup> Gül, "A Conversation with Abdullah Gül," *Council on Foreign Relations*.

<sup>295</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Republic of Turkey, "no: 209, 15 September 2011, Press Release regarding the Syrians Seeking Refuge in Turkey," <sup>295</sup> *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, September 15, 2011, accessed September 26, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no-209\\_-15-september-2011\\_-press-release-regarding-the--syrians-seeking-refuge-in-turkey.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no-209_-15-september-2011_-press-release-regarding-the--syrians-seeking-refuge-in-turkey.en.mfa).

<sup>296</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Statement by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, at the 39th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, 15 November 2012, Djibouti " *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, November 15, 2012, accessed September 24, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-mr\\_-ahmet-davutoglu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey\\_-at-the-39th-session-of-the-oic-council-of-foreign-m.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey_-at-the-39th-session-of-the-oic-council-of-foreign-m.en.mfa).

<sup>297</sup> Al Jazeera, "Interview with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Turkey's Role in the Middle East," *Al Jazeera*, February 12, 2014, accessed September 6, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NS9npyYQnac>.

of this regime remaining, and have tried in the past to encourage Assad to join the democratization process, but to no avail.”<sup>298</sup>

### Support to Islamic Parties

Despite their statements in support of the Arab Spring masses based solely on their demands for freedom and justice, the AKP elites were regularly accused of supporting and promoting the Muslim Brotherhood following the Arab Spring events.

Such support for Islamic parties in Arab Spring countries took two forms: First, the AKP elites pursued their aforementioned role in defending Islam that they had been playing since 2002. In 2011, Davutoğlu warned that the rise of Islamophobia is a reality, describing it as a “form of intolerance and discrimination motivated by deep ignorance, fear, suspicion and hatred of Islam” that is often “accompanied by racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance.”<sup>299</sup> He condemn “all sorts of incitement to hatred and religious discrimination against Muslims and people of other faiths” at the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2011, and warned that the aim of Islamophobia was to “create an abstract, imaginary enemy from the millions of peace-loving Muslims.”<sup>300</sup> Davutoğlu reiterated this position on Islamophobia and

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<sup>298</sup> Al-Bayanouni, “A Brotherhood Vision for Syria,” *Majalla Magazine*, November 29, 2013, Accessed on October 22, 2017, <http://eng.majalla.com/2013/11/article55247035/a-brotherhood-vision-for-syria>.

<sup>299</sup> Davutoğlu, "Address by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey at the 67th United Nations General Assembly, 28 September 2012, New York," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, September 28, 2012, accessed September 24, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-mr\\_-ahmet-davutoglu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-at-the-67th-united-nations-general-assembly\\_-28-september.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-at-the-67th-united-nations-general-assembly_-28-september.en.mfa).

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.



defended Islam during the OIC meetings in Djibouti (2012)<sup>301</sup>, Cairo (2013)<sup>302</sup> and Jeddah (2014)<sup>303</sup>.

The defense of Islam was not only limited to Islamophobia; it was also centered on the compatibility of Islam with democracy. In his address to the Founding Assembly of Tunisia in 2012, Gül expected Tunisia's success in economic developments and democratic reforms to highlight "the orientalist misconception that Islam and democracy and the 'socio-cultural texture' of the region and 'modernity' cannot find an accord will be rebutted."<sup>304</sup> Islamic scholar and Head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars Youssef Al Qardawi described the Arab Spring as Islamic because it called for values promoted by Islam, namely freedom, dignity and social justice.<sup>305</sup>

The AKP elites promoted the Turkish political and economic success story as a source of inspiration to Arab countries and a valid model for the new regional order vis-à-vis the West. And while they stressed that they were not "intentionally trying to export a regime", they did offer assistance to the new Arab Spring governments and

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<sup>301</sup> Davutoğlu, "Statement by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, at the 39th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, 15 November 2012, Djibouti,".

<sup>302</sup> Davutoğlu, "Statement by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the Ministerial Meeting Preparatory to the Twelfth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, 4 February 2013, Cairo," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, February 4, 2013, accessed September 24, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-the-ministerial-meeting-preparatory-to-the-twelfth-session-of-the-islamic-summit-conference\\_-4-february-2013\\_-cairo.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-h_e_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-the-ministerial-meeting-preparatory-to-the-twelfth-session-of-the-islamic-summit-conference_-4-february-2013_-cairo.en.mfa).

<sup>303</sup> Davutoğlu, "Address by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, at the 41st Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, 18 June 2014, Jeddah," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, June 18, 2014, accessed September 24, 2017, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davutoglu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey\\_-at-the-41st-session-of-the-oic-council.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/address-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey_-at-the-41st-session-of-the-oic-council.en.mfa).

<sup>304</sup> Gül, "Address by H.E. Abdullah Gül to the Founding Assembly of Tunisia,".

<sup>305</sup> Youssef Al-Qardawi, "Al-Qardawi: Arab Spring Called for the Principles of Islam," *International Union of Muslim Scholars*, January 20, 2017, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=6606>, (Translation from Arabic is mine).

promoted Turkey as “a model of democracy, a secular state, a social state with the rule of law upheld.”<sup>306</sup> Turkey’s decade-long engagement with Middle Eastern countries and especially the public has raised its profile and made “Arab intellectuals, activists, and youth leaders of different political inclinations” take a keen interest in what some described as the ‘Turkish model’<sup>307</sup>. Early in 2011, Davutoğlu stated that Turkey never claimed that it was “a role model for anyone [and] every country has its own adventure, its own historical, social and economic background.” His country does not desire to be a role model, Davutoğlu continued, but it welcomes anyone who wants to learn from the Turkish experience.<sup>308</sup>

Moreover, during his address at the Stanford School of Business in 2012, Gül’s reply to faculty member Condoleezza Rice<sup>309</sup> regarding the impossibility of having democracy in the Islamic World was “Turkey, the Turkish people, the most majority are Muslim[s] and are free to practice what they believe and democracy is functioning very well now...the main principle of democracy is functioning in Turkey.”<sup>310</sup>

The SMB acknowledged that while societies cannot merely clone the experiences of one another, “the Turkish democratic experience is characterized by

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<sup>306</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "TIME Meets Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Time Magazine*, September 26, 2011, accessed September 24, 2017, <http://world.time.com/2011/09/26/exclusive-time-meets-turkish-prime-minister-recep-tayyip-erdogan/>.

<sup>307</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, "Turkey and the Arab Spring," *Al Jazeera*, May 25, 2011, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/05/201152592939180898.html>

<sup>308</sup> Davutoğlu, "Talk to Jazeera - Ahmet Davutoglu," *Al Jazeera English*, February 15, 2011, accessed October 9, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AgLVaxRF50>.

<sup>309</sup> Condoleezza Rice is a Stanford University faculty member since 1981. From 2005-2009, Rice served as the 66<sup>th</sup> Secretary of State of the United States. *Stanford Business School*, accessed October 8, 2017, <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/faculty/condoleezza-rice>.

<sup>310</sup> Gül, "Turkish President Abdullah Gül: "the Age of People's Empowerment"," *Stanford School of Business*, May 22, 2012, accessed October 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh-KiAw-kns>.

the admiration and appreciation of the Syrian people.”<sup>311</sup> As such, Syrians who experienced democracy before the Baath regime can update “their experience with the benefit of others’ experiences.”<sup>312</sup> For his part, Al-Ghannouchi declared that the Turkish model is the closest to *Al-Nahda* in Tunisia given the many similarities between the AKP and *Al-Nahda*. Al-Ghannouchi went further to describe his books as one of the major references for the AKP.<sup>313</sup>

The AKP elites refused foreign intervention in the political transformation and demanded that the people choose their own future. Davutoğlu called on the international community not only to support the democratic transformation but also to accept the outcome of local elections regardless of whether the results are in line with the aspirations of the West. “The outcomes of elections should not change our principled position and the agenda of the international community should not be dictated by the security needs of Israel,” he warned.<sup>314</sup>

The AKP elites have assumed the same supporting position towards the participation and victories of Islamic parties in local elections: Davutoğlu criticized the West’s support of the military intervention in Algeria’s 1994 elections that were won by Islamists while Erdoğan defended Hamas’ victory in the Palestine’s 2006 legislative elections, stating that he did not consider Hamas a terror organization but a political party and a resistance movement that entered into politics and won the

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<sup>311</sup> Al-Shaqfa, "Self Defense," *The Majalla*.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Al-Ghannouchi, "Ghannouchi Seeks to Inspire the Turkish Model in Tunisia," *International Union for Muslim Scholars*, October 6, 2011, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://www.iuonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=3164>, (Translation from Arabic is mine).

<sup>314</sup> Davutoğlu, "Transformation of NATO and Turkey's Position," *Perceptions* Volume XVII, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 12.

elections.<sup>315</sup>

With the Arab Spring, the AKP elites saw Tunisia's successful Jasmine Revolution "as a beacon of hope and guide for those in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria." The success of the Tunisians, they believed, was not only "for Tunisia but also for all Muslims and humanity in the end..."<sup>316</sup> For Ibrahim Kalin, senior advisor to then Prime Minister Erdoğan, "the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the [Al-]Nahda movement in Tunisia, and Hamas in Palestine will all play important and legitimate roles in the political future of their respective countries."<sup>317</sup>

Such support to Islamic parties, especially after the Arab Spring, can be examined from two perspectives: First, the AKP elites believed that the "process of democratization naturally leads to a reflection of social values in the political systems enabling socio-cultural mass movements to influence political structures," and Islam has been the fundamental force of social integration in Muslim societies.<sup>318</sup> Second, they were sending a message to the West to accept the new reality of the post-2011 Arab World that revolved around the strength and legitimacy of Islamic parties in political life. Kalin saw that with this reality, "Americans and Europeans will need to engage these groups publicly and directly, as Turkey has done. After all, they are now part of the emerging political order in the Arab world."<sup>319</sup>

Islamic parties also picked up the idea of the appeal of Political Islam as a solution to the new regional order from the viewpoint of the West. Al-Bayanouni considered Islam as the underlying strength of the revolutionaries in Tunisia, Egypt

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<sup>315</sup> Erdoğan, "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Charlie Rose*.

<sup>316</sup> Gül, "Address by H.E. Abdullah Gül to the Founding Assembly of Tunisia,".

<sup>317</sup> Kalin, "Turkey and the Arab Spring," *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>318</sup> Davutoğlu, "Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics," 105.

<sup>319</sup> Kalin, "Turkey and the Arab Spring," *Al Jazeera*.

and Libya. He opined that the “West has begun to realize that moderate Islam can actually prevent extremism”<sup>320</sup>, thus the impossibility of ignoring the power of Islam in the Syrian revolution and the West will deal with this reality.<sup>321</sup>

It should be noted that Al-Bayanouni rejected the concept of Political Islam as it defined the role of Islam narrowly:

There is no such thing as Political Islam. Islam is Islam. In Islam there is politics, society, economics, inheritance and other things. Islam is a complete system. If you want politics without Islam, you will have something without ethics. We believe that Islam concerns itself with life—and that includes politics. This is why a separation of religion from state is impossible.<sup>322</sup>

That said, he acknowledged that, “most moderate Syrians will accept democracy because it is a tool to choose, remove or appoint a leader” and that “this does not contradict Islamic governance and exists within Islamic tradition [since] the time of the Prophet.”<sup>323</sup>

Al- Ghannouchi discussed the perspective from which the West sees the success of Islamic parties in such transformation based on meetings held with Western officials and diplomats. During those meetings, he was informed that the West stands “at one distance from all competitors and that they [Western officials] are interested in the success of the democratic transition because the failure of the transformation will be disastrous for the West and the migration of hundreds of thousands to Europe.”<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Al-Bayanouni, “A Brotherhood Vision for Syria,” *Majalla Magazin*

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Al-Ghannouchi, "Ghannouchi Seeks to Inspire the Turkish Model in Tunisia," *International Union for Muslim Scholars*.

Davutoğlu believed that the most important political principle of the transformation in the Arab world is the balance between freedom and security. Citing the AKP experience since 2002, he stated that such balance constitutes the cornerstone of the party's political philosophy. The AKP could not "ignore security for freedom or freedom for security" as sacrificing security for freedom will lead to chaos and, on the other hand, sacrificing freedom for security will result in autocratic regimes "where an individual will not have basic human rights."<sup>325</sup> Gül stressed that since the AKP came to power, it "recalibrated the balance between security and freedoms in favor of the latter."<sup>326</sup> In his first trip to Egypt after the January 2011 Revolution, Erdoğan declared that what the AKP asked and wished for the Turkish population, it also wished for Turkey's neighbors.<sup>327</sup>

For their part, Islamic parties saw in Turkey's democratic success a success for Arab and Islamic countries. Al-Qardawi considered that Erdoğan's election as Turkey's 12<sup>th</sup> president in August 2014 confirms the capability of Eastern, Arab and Muslim people to exercise their right to choose their leaders without any external guardianship, and their right for freedom, dignity and democracy.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Sixth Al Jazeera Forum,".

<sup>326</sup> Gül , "Address by H.E. Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey, at Chicago Council on Global Affairs,".

<sup>327</sup> Erdoğan, "Interview with Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayep Erdoğan," interview by Mona El Shazly, September 12, 2011, accessed November 28, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LaWvklG6oI>.

<sup>328</sup> Al-Qardawi, "Congratulation Message from Imam Al-Qardawi After the Victory of President Erdoğan in Turkey's Presidential Election," *The International Union of Muslim Scholars*, August 13, 2014, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=204>, (Translation from Arabic is mine).

## Support to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

Erdoğan was among the first regional leaders to ask Egyptian President Mubarak to heed the call of his people and satisfy their demands for change.<sup>329</sup>

Davutoğlu admitted that while Erdoğan's speech was the greatest risk in the history of Turkish foreign policy, it "is reverberating in the ears of the Egyptians even today and it is a speech that went down in history."<sup>330</sup> But at the end of the day, "politics is often the art of risk taking, to take the right risk morally and strategically at the right time."<sup>331</sup> From a strategic point of view, Erdoğan considered the cooperation between Egypt and Turkey valuable to the development of the Middle East and its stability, as Egypt was ready to perform its role after the January 2011 revolution. He called for assistance to be provided to Egypt not only for its sake or the Arab World's, but also for the future of the Middle East.<sup>332</sup>

Turkey attached significant importance to the success of the democratic process in Egypt and deemed that "each and every success of Egypt is as precious as Turkey's own success." It saw in Egypt the "single biggest strategic asset in the region."<sup>333</sup> Turkey did not wish the two countries to be in opposing blocs as in the Cold War but instead saw their cooperation as "heading towards creating the most important bilateral axis in the region."<sup>334</sup> As such, it decided to support the Egyptian

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<sup>329</sup> Ibon Villeda and Pinar Aydinli, "Turkey Tells Mubarak to Listen to the People," *Reuters*, February 1, 2011, accessed November 22, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-turkey/turkey-tells-mubarak-to-listen-to-the-people-idUSTRE71047Y20110201>.

<sup>330</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," 6-7.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Erdoğan, "A Comprehensive Dialogue with Erdoğan," Interview by Fahmi Huwaidi, *International Union of Muslim Scholars*, November 17, 2012, Accessed November 28, 2017, <http://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=5202>, (Translation from Arabic is mine).

<sup>333</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," 7-8.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

transformation, as demonstrated by Erdoğan's visit to Egypt alongside a delegation of 200 businessmen in September 2011<sup>335</sup>, even before the presidential elections that brought President Morsi to power.

The AKP elites have always seen Egypt as the engine of progress in the region and the flagship of the Arab World. Its "achievements, failures and changes of direction have been watched and felt not just across the Middle East and North Africa, but across the whole Islamic world."<sup>336</sup> After all, Egypt is the most populous Arab country and the sixth Muslim country in the world in terms of population,<sup>337</sup> not to mention its strategic geographic position at the intersection of three continents. But while these social and geopolitical factors are all important, Egypt was especially viewed by the AKP elites as "the brain of all Arabs [and] if it becomes a success story it will be the flagship of a convoy."<sup>338</sup> The reason behind such perspective is that Egypt is the birthplace of the Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan Al Banna in 1928. It is also where Gamal Abdul Nasser's Arab nationalist political ideology, Nasserism, gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s before spreading to the Arab World. Moreover, it is in Egypt that Islamic liberalism first manifested itself through the ideas of Khalid M. Khalid, Islamic modernism saw the light with Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, and where Muhammad al Ghazali's Islamic moderation was

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<sup>335</sup> Davutoğlu, "Speech Entitled "Vision 2023: Turkey's Foreign Policy Objectives,".

<sup>336</sup> Gül, "Egypt must Restore its Fledgling Democracy – and Fast," *Financial Times*, August 8, 2013, Accessed December 2, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/f7b9e0d0-0012-11e3-9c40-00144feab7de>.

<sup>337</sup> Pew Research Centre, "10 Countries with the Largest Muslim Populations, 2010 and 2050," *Pew Research Centre*, last modified April 2, 2015, accessed November 30, 2017, [http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/muslims/pf\\_15-04-02\\_projectionstables74/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/muslims/pf_15-04-02_projectionstables74/)

<sup>338</sup> Gül, "Egypt must Restore its Fledgling Democracy – and Fast," *Financial Times*.



born.<sup>339</sup> Lastly, Egypt is the home of Al Azhar University, a prominent center for Muslim and Arab learning in the world.

On the other hand, the AKP were aware of Egypt's importance in maintaining order and stability in the Middle East.<sup>340</sup> The fact that Egypt was the first country to sign a peace treaty with Israel in March 1979 and its proximity to Palestine, coupled with the aforementioned social and geopolitical strengths, make it a key player in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As such, and given that Palestine has always been at the core of the AKP's foreign policy, Turkey saw in Egypt a vital partner in the Palestinian cause. In November 2012, the two countries joined forces to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza, and Turkey believed that Egypt should be the main actor of this process.<sup>341</sup>

In light of Egypt's social, geopolitical, ideological and political influence - over the Arab and Islamic world throughout the country's history, it was vital for the AKP elites to support a new political leadership in Egypt after 2011 that falls in line with their political and social agenda for a new regional order. It was President Morsi and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (EMB) that they finally supported in spite of their claims that they would have supported any other leader as long as he was elected by the people.<sup>342</sup>

However, the extent of the AKP elites' support to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood became apparent after President Morsi was ousted by the military coup in July 2013 when Turkey called for the restoration of the democratic process through

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<sup>339</sup> Muqtedar Khan, "Egypt's Lead in the Arab World," *The Globalist*, august 21, 2013, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.theglobalist.com/egypts-lead-in-the-arab-world/>.

<sup>340</sup> Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," 7-8.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid, 7.

free and fair elections and for the release of political detainees, including Morsi. According to Gül, Egypt lies “at the heart of the Arab and Muslim World [and] the way in which Egypt now moves forward will affect the entire Middle East and North Africa.”<sup>343</sup> Gül’s stance reverberated across the AKP elites with Davutoğlu declaring right after the military coup against Morsi that Egypt occupies a central position in the Arab and Islamic world and has been a “source of inspiration for the Arab and Islamic world throughout history with its depth of civilization, its cultural wealth, its social vibrancy and its state tradition...” For Turkey, he added, Egypt “is a country which has constituted one of the most fundamental axes of our common culture.”<sup>344</sup> It should be noted here that by ‘common culture’, Davutoğlu was referring to the Islamic and social cultures.

That said, the AKP elites have perhaps lent the most social and religious support ever to the EMB on 17 August 2013 - one month after Morsi was removed from power -when Erdoğan raised his four fingers as a sign of solidarity with the deposed Egyptian president at a rally in the Turkish city of Bursa.<sup>345</sup> The ‘four-finger salute’ was first used by the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi supporters on 28 June 2013 during a sit-in they staged at Rabia Al-Adawiya Mosque in Cairo to protest the army coup against Morsi. Rabia in Arabic means ‘four’ or ‘fourth’, thus its link to the four-finger symbol.<sup>346</sup> According to the Anadolu Agency the ‘Rabia sign’ “has

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<sup>343</sup> Gül, "A Conversation with Abdullah Gül," *Council on Foreign Relations*.

<sup>344</sup> Davutoglu, "Press Statement by H.E. Mr. Ahmet Davutoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey on the Latest Developments in Egypt, 4 July 2013, Istanbul," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, July 4, 2013, accessed November 22, 2017, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/press-statement-by-h-e-mr-ahmet-davutoglu-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-on-the-latest-developments-in-egypt-4-july-2013-istanbul.en.mfa>.

<sup>345</sup> Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "'Four-Finger Salute' shows Solidarity with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," last modified August 24, 2013, accessed October 26, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/egypt-four-finger-salute/25085068.html>.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

become the most rapidly spreading symbol across the globe in recent years [and] millions across the Muslim world from Malaysia to Morocco have begun using it as an avatar image on their social media profiles.”<sup>347</sup> The agency quoted the ‘Rabia sign’ website ([www.r4bia.com](http://www.r4bia.com)) that stated:

The Rabia sign is the symbol of awakening, triggered in response to the massacres, oppression and on-going political, economic and cultural pressure – both in the West and the East – that have targeted Islam and Muslims.

Western concepts such as democracy, human rights, freedom, equality and right to life, often exercised in a double standard, have utterly collapsed in Palestine, Syria, Bosnia and lastly in Egypt. With the spirit of the Rabia sign, these and similar concepts will be reinterpreted based on Islamic principles.<sup>348</sup>

Erdoğan has been regularly using this sign at rallies across Turkey since 2013. On 3 November 2013, at the closing session of the AKP’s 21<sup>st</sup> Consultation and Evaluation Meeting, he declared, "Rabia sign is not only a sign of the right case of Egyptians, but also a sign of saying no to injustices, suppressions, crackdowns, massacres and coup in all over the world." The AKP “cannot be impartial and those who are impartial are eliminated,” he said. “Turkey always takes place on the side of the right one and will continue to do it.”<sup>349</sup> Several Islamic scholars have also used the Rabia sign on their social media accounts. These include the Secretary-General of the International Union of Muslim Scholars Ali Al-Qaradaghi, Saudi cleric Salman Al-

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<sup>347</sup> Anadolu Agency, "Multilingual Website Devoted to R4BIA Sign Now Running," August 27, 2013, accessed October 26, 2017, <http://aa.com.tr/en/world/multilingual-website-devoted-to-r4bia-sign-now-running/222902>.

<sup>348</sup> A search for the website [www.r4bia.com](http://www.r4bia.com) is diverted to the website [www.rabiaplatform.com](http://www.rabiaplatform.com). This site is in Turkish. The explanations provided by the Turkish Anadolu Agency will be used in this thesis.

<sup>349</sup> Anadolu Agency, "Rabia Sign Now a Global Sign of Saying no to Injustice: PM Erdoğan," November 3, 2013, accessed October 26, 2017, <http://aa.com.tr/en/archive/rabia-sign-now-a-global-sign-of-saying-no-to-injustice-pm-Erdoğan/206982>.

Ouda, Kuwaiti Islamic writer and preacher Tarik Al-Suwaidan and Egyptian Islamic preacher Fadil Suleiman.<sup>350</sup>

In conclusion, it should be noted that Turkey's support to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is different from the support it lent to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. While Turkey had been involved in mediation efforts between the Syrian government and the SMB before 2011, such involvement was non-existent in Egypt. Nonetheless, Turkey's support for the SMB after 2011 cannot be examined independently from its search for a new regional order with Political Islam as its uniting factor. Indeed, and as previously shown, Turkey's direct support for Arab masses after 2011, its continuity in defending Islam's compatibility with democracy and its quest for a new power axis with Egypt's EMB as a key partner all highlight the conditions that saw a shift in Turkey's post-2011 Syrian foreign policy.

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<sup>350</sup> International Union of Islamic Scholars, "Rabia Sign Icon for Clerics, Preachers and Academicians on Twitter," *International Union of Islamic Scholars*, December 3, 2013, accessed November 28, 2017, <http://iumsonline.org/ar/2/789/>. (Translation from Arabic is mine).

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I present the conclusions of my research. I revisit the overall thesis objective, research questions and summarize the findings. I also recommend future research that will allow a better understanding of Middle Eastern politics in the context of the Arab Spring events.

#### Thesis Objective and Questions

This thesis aimed at understanding the conditions under which Turkey changed its foreign policy toward Syria following the Arab Springs events in 2011. It investigated the role of Political Islam in the Turkish elite's role conception, as well as its impact on Turkey's quest for a new regional order. I divided the research question into three sub-questions:

Firstly, the international and regional geopolitical context in which Turkey defined its foreign policy toward the Syrian conflict; secondly, the role of Political Islam in Turkey's Syrian foreign policy following the Arab Spring; and thirdly, the use of Political Islam in the Turkish elites' national role concept that defined Turkey's foreign policy toward Syria.

#### Research Findings

I used Role Theory as the theoretical foundation of this thesis by showing the three roles played by Turkey before 2011, namely 'Defender of Islam', 'Liberation supporter' and 'Regional leader'. The role of 'Defender of Islam' was reflected in

the AKP elites' defense of Islam and its compatibility with democracy as well as their calls for reforms in Muslim countries, while the role of 'Liberation supporter' was apparent in their support for the Palestinian cause that is central to Turkey's foreign policy. Lastly, Turkey played a 'Regional leader' role by showcasing its political and economic reforms, as a Muslim-majority country, in an attempt to inspire other Arab and Islamic countries.

Using the same theory, I proved Turkey's ongoing role as 'Defender of Islam' in its post-2011 foreign policy, to which was added the role of 'Liberation supporter' through its support for the Arab Spring masses. The third role, 'Regional leader' was viewed by the AKP elites as more than just a call for reforms through the Arab world and a showcase of Turkey's political and economic success; consequently, it rose to prominence as a role that aims to create a new regional order.

In answer to the first sub-question of my research, I demonstrated how, from a geopolitical perspective, the AKP elites saw the Arab Spring as a natural flow of history that should have happened at the end of the Cold War, akin to the democratic movements in Eastern and Central Europe. As such, its implications supersede the 'Liberation supporter' role in supporting democracy and freedom to one of 'Regional leader' aimed at redrawing Arab world politics which date back before the Cold War to the days of colonialism and imposed secularism that divided countries and separated Islam from political life. For Al-Ghannouchi, "secularism in the modern Arab experience resulted in pledging religion, society and the mind to the hegemony of a new church, the state of the secular elite, or what one may call the state of 'secular theocracy'."<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Al-Ghannouchi, "Secularism in the Arab Maghreb," 105.

For the second sub-question, I showed that Turkey pursued its role of ‘Defender of Islam’ after 2011. Such role not only aimed at showing that Islam and democracy are compatible but extended to supporting Islamic parties in Arab Spring countries. The AKP’s belief in the role of Political Islam in Arab Spring countries and Turkey’s regional foreign policy were clearly evidenced by the Turkish mediation efforts between the SMB and the Syrian Government on the one hand and the AKP’s open support for the EMB and their denunciation of the ousting of President Morsi on the other.

I answered the third and last sub-question by showing how Turkey played the three roles simultaneously with a view to create a new regional order. The AKP called for the loosening of existing regional borders that would reconnect cities and regions that were once joined under the Ottoman Empire. This reflected a tendency to create something close to the European Union integration- at least in terms of the free flow of people and reconnection of old and historic ties. However, the AKP’s support for Islamic parties - particularly the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Spring countries – mainly stemmed from their cognitive belief that Political Islam is the unifying factor of such new regional order and also a solution to the loss of legitimacy of Arab regimes like Nasserism and Baathism that ruled the Arab World during the Cold War but have lost their values and symbols today.<sup>352</sup> It should be noted here that while not all Islamic parties in Arab Spring countries are the same and some political differences do exist between them, from a Turkish perspective, they would all make good partners in the new regional order owing to their religious Islamic foundations, especially in Egypt.

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<sup>352</sup> Davutoğlu, *The Strategic Depth*, 399.

Finally, the research findings revealed that Turkey's support for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was based on Turkey's need for a strong partner in the new regional order. The AKP elites were eyeing Egypt's geopolitical importance but also its influence over the rest of the Arab countries. In the words of Gül, Egypt is "the brain of all Arabs [and] if it becomes a success story it will be the flagship of a convoy."<sup>353</sup> Turkey needed an Arab partner for the new regional order and Egypt under the Muslim Brotherhood was the best possible option.

#### Future Research

This thesis used two independent variables to study the conditions under which Turkey changed its foreign policy toward Syria after the Arab Springs events. The first is Political Islam as a role concept in the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy, and the second is the Islamic parties as the 'audience' to the role enactment of Turkish foreign policy.

That said, other variables remain to be investigated in future research for a better understanding of Turkey's foreign policy vis-à-vis the Arab Spring. First, the relations between Iran and Turkey should be studied in light of the Syrian crisis. While each of these two regional powers supports an opposing pole in the Syrian conflict - Iran supports President Al-Assad both directly and through its allies while Turkey backs the opposition – they have managed to maintain close economic ties and have so far avoided any direct confrontation. Actually, the two countries are currently engaged with Russia in a bid to find a political solution in Syria.

Another point that merits examination is the position of the West vis-à-vis Turkey's role in the Arab Spring and the new regional order it has envisaged. Western

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<sup>353</sup> Gül, "Egypt must Restore its Fledgling Democracy – and Fast," *Financial Times*.



countries have for years supported President Ben Ali in Tunisia, President Mubarak in Egypt and President Saleh in Yemen, and have maintained the status quo with President Al-Assad in Syria. The question to be posed here is whether the West also believed in a new regional order where Political Islam plays a key role and if it approved, nay encouraged Turkey's plans for the region.

Finally, an area that is equally important for future research is Turkey's improved relation with Russia over the Syrian conflict since mid-2016. Relations between both countries soured in November 2015 after the Turkish Air Force downed a Russian plane. Several questions should be posed in this regard: Did the Turkish foreign policy underestimate Russia's determination to support President Al-Assad as well as its direct involvement in the Syrian war with a view to preserve its geopolitical position in the region? Did the shift in Turkey's policy toward the Syrian conflict after mid-2016 result from the economic sanctions Russia placed in November 2015, or did it also stem from Turkey's belief that its original plans for a regional order with Political Islam as a unifying factor have failed? Also, how did Russia's condemnation of the failed coup against President Erdoğan in July 2016 affect Turkey's policy toward the Syrian conflict?

The suggested future research will allow us to better understand regional and international politics toward the Arab Spring countries and its implications on the future of the Middle East.

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