

## Interpreting Turkey's Middle East Policy in the Last Decade\*

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### Abstract

*Within the Middle East, various forces have tried to impose alternative orders. Turkey is among a number of key players in the region. Since 2002, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party has shown an increasing interest in the Middle East. This article accepts that there has been a change in Turkish foreign policy since 2002 and attempts to contribute to the previous studies on this issue. It argues that Turkey desires to be a regional power in the Middle East, shaping its vision through a value-based and principled approach. To clarify this vision, the article analyzes the core values and principles defined in Turkish foreign policy in the last decade, which constitute Turkey's international identity in the Middle East. The article concludes that there have been mainly tactical changes in Turkish foreign policy in general, and towards the Middle East in particular.*

**Key Words:** Turkey, foreign policy, Middle East, AKP, regional order

*"Just as we aspire for a new Turkey, we also aspire for a new Middle East."*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

The debate about the change in Turkish foreign policy over the past decade has been very rich. For instance, there are arguments in relation to the European Union,<sup>2</sup> geopolitical and ideational factors<sup>3</sup>, economic factors<sup>4</sup> and Turkish identity.<sup>5</sup> There are also arguments rejecting that there is anything 'new' in foreign policy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu quoted in "Is Turkish Foreign Policy Too Ambitious?," *Al-Monitor*, September 12, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/04/overly-ambitious.html#>.

<sup>3</sup> Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Middle East after September 11: The Importance of the EU Dimension," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2003): 83-92; Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era," *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 2009): 7-24.

<sup>4</sup> Şaban Kardaş, "Charting the New Turkish Foreign Policy," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 67 (March 2012): 1-6; İbrahim Kalın, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Framework, Values and Mechanism," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 67 (March 2012): 7-21.

<sup>5</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40 (2009): 29-57; Özlem Tür, "Economic Relations with the Middle East under the AKP- Trade Business Community and Reintegration with Neighboring Zones," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 589-602.

<sup>6</sup> Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu, *Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity: A Constructivist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2003); Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 55-70; Bahar Rumelili, "Turkey: Identity, Foreign Policy, and Socialization in a Post-Enlargement Europe," *Journal of European Integration* 33, no. 2 (2011): 235-49.

<sup>7</sup> Nur Bilge Criss, "Parameters of Turkish Foreign Policy under the AKP Governments," UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (May 2010); İlhan Uzelçel, "Dış Politikada AKP: Stratejik Konumdan Stratejik Modele" [AKP's Foreign Policy: From Strategic Position to

In general, change in foreign policy involves two types of change: tactical and strategic. *Tactical change* focuses on the methods and instruments of foreign policy, and as such, is more of an adjustment, referring to a change in the level of effort or to a program change. *Strategic change* is more fundamental, such as altering goals and/or the state's position in the international system.<sup>7</sup> Constructivism is useful for understanding the process of change in foreign policy because it allows examining national identity construction and its impact on change in foreign policy rather than only materialist concerns of power and capability.

According to Altunışık and Martin, there has been an adjustment change in Turkish foreign policy because Turkey's activism has extended in the region and become comprehensive. There has also been a program change because rather than approaching relations only from a security sense, the AKP government began using diplomatic negotiation and economic engagement. 'Goal' and 'international orientation' changes are considered less obvious than the first two shifts, but there have been shifts in those factors also. Further, Altunışık and Martin compared the first term of the AKP government with its second, stating that in the second term there were more policy changes.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, this article accepts that there has been a change in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East since 2002 and attempts to contribute to this argument. Thus, the article first addresses changes in foreign policy during the AKP government's time in office. Then, particularly focusing on Turkey's approach to the Middle East, the article emphasizes Turkey's quest to be a regional power, and that its vision in this regard is shaped by 'value based' and 'principled' methods. To clarify this vision, the article analyzes the core values and principles defined in Turkish foreign policy in the last decade, which constitute Turkey's international identity in the Middle East. It concludes that there have been mainly tactical changes in Turkish foreign policy in general, and towards the Middle East in particular.

## 2. The Changes

There have been several tactical changes in Turkish foreign policy. First, the change from limited Turkish involvement in regional affairs to independent initiatives, as observed in its foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue, might be considered significant. It is frequently expressed that Turkey sides with all people whose dignity has been jeopardized; being a defender of human dignity means defending justice. Ahmet Davutoğlu, currently prime minister, and previously foreign policy minister, argues that recognizing a Palestinian state is a moral, legal and political obligation of the international community.<sup>9</sup> But Davutoğlu also maintains that while Turkey should defend human dignity with active diplomacy, it must also follow a realist foreign policy,<sup>10</sup> thus Turkey's change to its foreign policy towards Palestine is considered a tactical change rather than a strategic one. Second, Turkey has increased its use of soft power<sup>11</sup> due to its increased economic development and its ability to pursue active

Strategic Model], in *AKP Kitabı. Bir Dönüşümün Bilançosu* [The AKP. An Account of Transformation], ed. İlhan Uzgel and Bülent Duru (Ankara: Phoenix, 2009), 364, 379.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Alden and Amnon Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis: New Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 92-3.

<sup>8</sup> Meliha B. Altunışık and Lenore G. Martin, "Making sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 572-73.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye'nin Restorasyonu: Güçlü Demokrasi, Dinamik Ekonomi, Etkin Diplomasi," *Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi*, No. 7 (August 2014).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 79; Tarık Oğuzlu, "Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 1 (2007): 81-97; Bülent Aras, "Turkey's Soft Power," SETA, April 14, 2009, <http://arsiv.setav.org/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=5489&q=turkey-s-soft>

diplomacy. Third, in line with its national interests and objectives, Turkey has attempted to develop friendly relations with its neighbors and neighboring regions.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the AKP government initiated a “zero problems with neighbors”<sup>13</sup> slogan to help generate new relations.<sup>14</sup> As another example, Turkey has attempted to normalize relations with Armenia<sup>15</sup> and Iran.<sup>16</sup> Fourth, Turkey has focused on improving relations with Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America, regions with which it previously had few interactions, if any. Thus, the aim is to be active not only in familiar areas but also in new ones. In this regard, Turkey has promised to contribute to security, stability and prosperity not only in its immediate neighborhood, but also in territories far beyond its borders. Turkey is attempting to become a ‘central country,’ occupying a strong and an important position in regional systems, as well as to become a ‘world power’ in the long term.<sup>17</sup> Fifth, the influence of the military in shaping Turkish foreign policy has been reduced while the role of independent research centers has flourished, which can be viewed as an attempt for a less-securitized relationship with neighbors. Sixth, a stronger multidimensional foreign policy<sup>18</sup> has become an important new characteristic, particularly in the AKP’s third term. Seventh, Turkey has worked on being more active in international and regional organizations.<sup>19</sup> Eighth, early on there were efforts towards Europeanization in the conduct of foreign policy, though in the post-2005 era, the effect of the EU axis on foreign policy has declined.<sup>20</sup> Ninth, there has been an attempt to integrate Turkey’s foreign policy discourse with its domestic political discourse.<sup>21</sup> The AKP has called for integrating achievements in domestic democratic consolidation and economic stability into the vision of foreign policy.<sup>22</sup> In this regard, Davutoğlu stated:

When we talk about [the] Turkish role in international politics ... We can say if there is a way there are three pillars. The political pillar is democracy and reforms. The economic pillar is economic growth and sustainable economic growth. And [the] foreign policy pillar is an active, even pro-active, peace-oriented foreign policy. And these three are interlinked.<sup>23</sup>

Davutoğlu also said that “Turkey [has] achieved progress in establishing a stable and peaceful domestic order on which it can build a proactive foreign policy.”<sup>24</sup> Its more liberalized political system and its strong economy are opportunities to follow an active foreign policy. Today,

power; “Turkey Ready to Support Peace Talks in The Middle East,” *Turkish Journal*, October 18, 2010, <http://www.turkishjournal.com/i.php?newsid=8499>.

<sup>12</sup> Oniş and Yılmaz, “Between Europeanization,” 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Zero Problems Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy*, May 20, 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/20/turkeys-zero-problems-foreign-policy/>.

<sup>14</sup> Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision,” 81-2.

<sup>15</sup> Kirişçi, “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy,” 32.

<sup>16</sup> Nilüfer Karacasulu and İrem Aşkar Karakır, “Iran-Turkey Relations in the 2000s: Pragmatic Rapprochement,” *Ege Akademik Bakış* [Ege Academic Review] 11, no. 1 (2011): 111-19.

<sup>17</sup> Bülent Aras, “Arabulucu Değil, Oyun Kurucu Dış Politika,” SETA, March 14, 2011, <http://arsiv.setav.org/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=28828&q=arabulucu-degil-oyun-kurucu-dis-politika>.

<sup>18</sup> Heinz Kramer, “AKP’s New Foreign Policy between Vision and Pragmatism,” Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Working Paper (2010); “62. Hükümet Programı,” Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/62nciHukümetProgrami.pdf>, 165-7.

<sup>19</sup> “62. Hükümet Programı,” 177.

<sup>20</sup> An alternative status was presented as an option by EU members, causing negative sentiments in Turkey. Furthermore, in 2006, the issue of Cyprus had frozen eight chapters of the EU’s *acquis communautaire*. Oniş and Yılmaz, “Between Europeanization,” 13. Turkey and the EU agreed to restart accession talks in November 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Zero Problems Foreign Policy”; Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Türkiye’nin Restorasyonu.”

<sup>22</sup> “62. Hükümet Programı,” 165.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Vision 2023: Turkey’s Foreign Policy Objectives” (speech delivered at the Turkey Investor Conference: The road to 2023, London, November 22, 2011), [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-\\_vision-2023\\_-turkey\\_s-foreign-policy-objectives\\_-\\_delivered-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davutoğlu\\_-\\_minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-_vision-2023_-turkey_s-foreign-policy-objectives_-_delivered-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoğlu_-_minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa).

<sup>24</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring,” TEPAV Turkey Policy Brief Series (2012): 2.

with a GDP of 820 billion dollars,<sup>25</sup> Turkey is the eighteenth-largest economy in the world. It has made advances in competitiveness since the last decade, and can further increase those, as well as increase productivity. Foreign direct investment increased from one billion dollars to 13 billion dollars over the last five years.<sup>26</sup> As Turkey has become economically stronger, its national confidence has also increased. It has begun to put the nation's economic interests at the forefront, which can be considered as the tenth tactical change.

On the other hand, Turkey's military spending has been decreasing. Turkey spent 3.5 percent of its GDP on defense in 2002, which decreased to 1.71 percent in 2014.<sup>27</sup> The government has realized opportunities for regional cooperation through rediscovering cultural ties and common civilization. As Davutoğlu states, there are many potential conflicts, from the Balkans to Caucasia, from the Black Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, from the Gulf to North Africa, yet Turkey aims to turn these regions into a basin of prosperity, stability and security through the assistance of the international community.<sup>28</sup> Thus, there has been a change from a confrontational, security-focused foreign-policy discourse to more cooperative one, which could also be considered a tactical change.

Davutoğlu also emphasizes that Turkey has been undergoing a period of restoration over the last 10 years. He notes that restoration first began during the Ottoman period, with the *Tanzimat*. The second period of restoration was the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and the third was Turkey's transition to a multiparty system. Currently, the AKP government is encouraging a fourth complex restoration period in politics, economics and societal aspects, as outlined by Davutoğlu. He states that this restoration requires three interconnected features – a strong democracy, a dynamic economy and effective diplomacy – and argues that once these three features are complete, Turkey will be an active participant in the global system.<sup>29</sup>

A brief analysis of AKP programs since 2002 shows that while there have been tactical changes in foreign policy, the core realist orientation has remained. The first program implemented stated that a realist foreign policy would be followed, and indicated that policy priorities would be redefined parallel to regional and global transformations. The highest priority would be given to relations with the EU.<sup>30</sup> The next party program confirmed the use of a realist foreign policy, emphasizing Turkey's geopolitical importance and specifying regional policies. Relations with the EU were still given high priority.<sup>31</sup> Relatively different from the first two programs, the third declared that Turkey was to follow a multidimensional foreign policy and had to be more assertive, as well as be willing to develop more relations with its neighbors. It indicated a need to develop relations with Turkic and related states and communities, with particular attention on the Middle East. Further, the significance of

<sup>25</sup> "Türkiye - GSYİH – 2014," Trading Economics, <http://tr.tradingeconomics.com/turkey/gdp>.

<sup>26</sup> "Turkey Overview," the World Bank, [www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview).

<sup>27</sup> "Turkish Defense Minister İsmet Yılmaz says defense spending has touched 29.4 billion Turkish lira or \$13.2 billion this year." ("Turkey's defense spending touches \$13 billion mark," *Anadolu Agency*, November 2, 2014, <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/414144--turkey-s-defense-spending-touches-13-billion-mark>.)

<sup>28</sup> Bilgehan Öztürk, "Avrupa Birliği'nin İran ve Suriye Politikasının Türkiye'ye Etkisi," *Orta Doğu Analiz* 4, no. 48 (December 2012): 46.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye'nin Restorasyonu"; Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Foreign Economic Relations and Diplomacy" (speech, Foreign Economic Relations Board, İstanbul, March 9, 2013), [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu-nun-dis-ekonomik-iliskiler-kurulu-tarafindan-duzenlenen-toplantida-yaptiklari-konusma\\_9.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu-nun-dis-ekonomik-iliskiler-kurulu-tarafindan-duzenlenen-toplantida-yaptiklari-konusma_9.tr.mfa); Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Great Restoration: Our New Political Approach from Ancient to Globalization," (lecture, Dicle University, Diyarbakir, March 15, 2013), <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-Davutoglu-delivers-a-lecture-at-dicle-university-in-diyarbakir.en.mfa>.

<sup>30</sup> "58. Hükümet Programı," Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/58inci-hukumet-programi.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> "59. Hükümet Programı," Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/59uncu-hukumet-programi.pdf>.

providing humanitarian aid was expressed for the first time.<sup>32</sup> The program also specified that since 2002 the government has tried to strengthen Turkey's international image as a significant regional player.<sup>33</sup> A visionary policy was adopted in the fourth program, which defined the Turkish goal for many regional and global issues and specified a balanced attitude between idealism and realism.<sup>34</sup> This program showed that AKP's confidence in its foreign policy attitude had highly increased. The fifth and final program was presented by Prime Minister Davutoğlu in September 2014, calling for a multidimensional foreign policy and normalization of relations with neighbors. In other words, the government does not desire a securitization of relations with regional countries despite the transformations and crises in the Middle East. For the first time, the rhetoric highly emphasized a value-based foreign policy and a new foreign policy.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. A Value-Based and Principled Foreign Policy towards the Middle East

In March 2013, then-Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated that the core principles of Turkish foreign policy are “a balance between security and freedom, zero problems with neighbors, a multidimensional foreign policy, a pro-active regional foreign policy, an altogether new diplomatic style, and rhythmic diplomacy.”<sup>36</sup> Key to understanding Turkey's vision towards the Middle East is to understand the AKP government's quest for Turkey to be a regional power or leader in the area. Turkey is also attempting to be seen as a wise country (*akıl ülke*) in the eyes of the international community through its adoption and defense of international norms, values and principles.<sup>37</sup> Davutoğlu highlights this goal by stating that:

Especially in times of crises, such as the economic crisis the world is going through or the political transformation in our region, the need for wise countries to deliver such essential functions as conflict prevention, mediation, conflict resolution or development assistance becomes particularly evident.<sup>38</sup>

The AKP government's regional power outlook is defined within three main dimensions. The first is being an order-instituting country;<sup>39</sup> the second is being a game setter; and the third is being a problem solver.<sup>40</sup>

Table 1- Regional power typology

	<i>Regional power</i>
<i>Self-concept</i>	Confident (important country with its own geography, history and economy)
<i>Relations with other actors</i>	Prefers dialogue to improve regional relations; close cooperation with global powers; attempts to be active in international and regional institutions
<i>Policy style</i>	Assertive; increased diplomatic activity; use of soft power
<i>Economic policy</i>	Promotes trade relations; economic cooperation and integration

<sup>32</sup> “60. Hükümet Programı,” Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/60inci-hukümet-programi.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Kardaş, “Charting the new Turkish Foreign Policy,” 5.

<sup>34</sup> “61. Hükümet Programı,” Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/61inci-hukümet-programi.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> “62. Hükümet Programı.”

<sup>36</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Zero Problems in a New Era,” *Foreign Policy Magazine (USA)*, March 21, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> “İşte, Davutoğlu'nun 2011 Hedefi: Akil ülke Türkiye!,” *Turkish Journal*, December 28, 2010, <http://www.turkishjournal.com/i.php?newsid=8884>; “Avrupa'nın nesnesi değil parçasıyız, Afro-Asya'da merkez olmaya çalışıyoruz,” *Hürriyet newspaper*, December 11, 2010, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/16505065.asp>.

<sup>38</sup> Davutoğlu, “Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring,” 3.

<sup>39</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş and Ali Balcı, “AKP Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası Sözlüğü: Kavramsal bir harita,” *Bilgi* 23 (2011): 13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Another core principle that Turkey adopted in foreign policy is related to balancing security and freedom. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, governments have felt the need to take greater precautions against international terrorism challenges. There is also a need to protect freedom. Thus, governments must strive to achieve a balance between freedom and security. In other words, while trying to protect citizens against security breaches, countries must also be careful not to limit citizens' freedom. Turkey's approach to this issue is evident from Davutoğlu's words: "The legitimacy of any political regime comes from its ability to provide security to its citizens; this security should not be at the expense of freedoms and human rights in the country."<sup>41</sup>

In the discussion of keeping the balance between security and freedom, the Turkish government also comments on military interventions in politics. Davutoğlu argues that Turkey's experienced military interventions were in the name of security but they limited freedom, which hindered the development of democracy.<sup>42</sup> He underlines that there is no more need for military intervention in Turkish politics. The democratic packages accepted for EU conditionality are considered to have had a positive impact in this regard. Thus, Turkey can acknowledge both democracy and freedom in its strive for balance. The government has extended the democratic discourse to sensitive security issues. For example, the Kurdish problem is no longer considered only a national security problem but also related to democracy. Turkey's efforts to keep this balance will be also be relevant to countries facing similar problems, which is an example of how domestic politics and foreign policy are interacting, as mentioned earlier. Overall, with EU conditionality, Turkey has tried to implement democratic consolidation at home, which in turn assists with security.

Another core principle of Turkish foreign policy concerns an ethical policy towards neighbors. From a realist point of view it is obvious that the AKP government has given importance to security and stability. Yet, the government has also attempted to provide solutions to regional conflicts through being a mediator or a facilitator, and a reliable, honest and strong actor throughout. Thus, the AKP emphasizes that it respects human rights, democracy, the rule of law and social justice. In this regard, Davutoğlu says, "In pursuit of our global objectives, we will endeavor to listen to the consciousness and common sense of humanity, and become a firm defender of universal values," particularly advocating "human rights and such norms as democracy, good governance, transparency and rule of law."<sup>43</sup> Kalın states that the AKP has combined values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law with the traditional, conservative values of Turkish-Islamic culture.<sup>44</sup> Turkey's regional foreign policy vision is described as a value-based (*değer odaklı*) realist foreign policy.<sup>45</sup> In other words, it is argued that the Turkish government defends universal values, norms and principles, and at the same time aims to bring stability, security and peace through rational means.

What is 'ethical foreign policy'? The realist answer is that 'there is no such thing.' Some might argue that ethical considerations are minor in international politics because of several

<sup>41</sup> Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision," 79.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy" (speech, SETA Foundation at Washington DC, December 8, 2009), <http://arsiv.setav.org/ups/dosya/14808.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Davutoğlu, "Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring," 2.

<sup>44</sup> Kalın, "Turkish Foreign Policy," 12.

<sup>45</sup> "62. Hükümet Programı," 165; Nuh Yılmaz, "Değer Eksikli Realist Dış Politika Ve Eksen Kayması," SETAV, November 2009, [www.setav.org.tr/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=5486](http://www.setav.org.tr/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=5486); Kalın, "Turkish Foreign Policy," 9.

factors: politics is understood as a struggle for power; ethical criteria change from one society to another, as understood within communitarian ethics; there is no ethical consensus and ethical choices are personal matters.<sup>46</sup> Yet a foreign policy does not need to be unselfish to be moral. As Brown argues, “there is nothing inherently immoral in being self-interested so long as the interests of others are also taken into account – an ethical foreign policy will be one that creatively marries these two motivations, not one that suppresses the former in the interests of the latter.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, pursuing national interests can incorporate ethical goals. Here, ethical foreign policy is considered in the sense of a policy that defines the principles and practice of foreign affairs based on respect for universal rights.<sup>48</sup>

Öniş argues that before the Arab Spring there was lack of ethical Turkish foreign policy, and that the Arab Spring had created a dilemma for Turkey between ethical and self-interested foreign policy. He relates the government's ethical attitude to the support given for a pluralistic political system, and in general, to the support given for democracy promotion.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Dal argues that since 2002, the AKP government has increased the use of normative foreign policy, relating the government's ethical attitude to value-based discourse, international mediation efforts, call for a reform in the UN system and call for inter-civilizational dialogue, as well as active diplomacy in regional organizations.<sup>50</sup> Overall, it is not possible to argue that Turkey currently possess an ambitious normative foreign policy agenda. Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight that according to Davutoğlu, foreign policy is also related to ethics. The government feels that a realist foreign policy has to be balanced with a humanitarian and conscience-driven diplomacy (*insani ve vicdani diplomasi*). Davutoğlu says, “We hope that God will give us the ability to help the people who are seeking the help of God.”<sup>51</sup> Davutoğlu underlines this approach through these words: “Turkey will continue to follow a foreign policy approach that is based on values, including the protection of human rights, refugees, democracy and helping the least developed countries.”<sup>52</sup>

As mentioned above, Turkey's regional foreign policy vision is considered a value-based (*değer odaklı*) realist foreign policy.<sup>53</sup> An example of values in action was then-Prime Minister Erdogan walking out of 2009 Davos summit in protest at not being allowed to speak for as long as Israel's President Peres did, and as a way of criticizing Israel's policies in Gaza. The walk-out can also be considered a principled position. In 2015, new Prime Minister Davutoğlu attended the Davos summit, yet he also stated that Turkey should continue to say, “One minute,” about Israel's attacks on Palestine.<sup>54</sup> It seems, thus, that the AKP has put support for the Palestinian issue at the centre of its values agenda. The AKP has shown many other examples of standing up on the world stage for what it believes is right, such

<sup>46</sup> Mervyn Frost, *Global Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Brown, *Practical Judgment in International Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 15.

<sup>48</sup> Studies on ethical foreign policy are limited. For some examples, see: David Chandler and Volker Heins, eds., *Rethinking Ethical Foreign Policy: Pitfalls, possibilities and paradoxes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Karen E. Smith and Margot Light, *Ethics and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; first published in 2001).

<sup>49</sup> According to Öniş, AKP foreign policy was not based on the notion of democracy promotion prior to the Arab Spring, which was evident in Turkey's relations with Iran and Sudan. See Öniş, “Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self Interest,” 46.

<sup>50</sup> Emel Parlar Dal, “Assessing Turkey's “Normative” Power in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and their Limitations,” *Turkish Studies* 14, no. 4 (2013): 716-18.

<sup>51</sup> “İşte 9 maddelik Davutoğlu manifestosu,” *Haber 7*, August 27 2014, <http://www.haber7.com/ic-politika/haber/1195165-iste-9-maddelik-Davutoğlu-manifestosu>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “62. Hükümet Programı”; Nuh Yılmaz, “Değer Eksenli Realist Dış Politika”; Kalın, “Turkish Foreign Policy,” 9.

<sup>54</sup> On the 2015 Davos meeting, see: “Davutoğlu'ndan Davos'ta 2. one minute Çıkışı,” *Aksam Newspaper*, January 22, 2015, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/Davutoğlundan-davosta-2-one-minute-cikisi/haber-374964>.

as supporting the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and speaking out against the military coup, demonstrating that it is against undemocratic movements in post-2011 politics; and speaking out against the bloody massacres committed by Assad's internal forces in Syria. Moreover, the Turkish government has supported the development of freedom and democracy in the Middle East by repeatedly saying that regional politicians should develop a vision appropriate to "the soul of the contemporary period."<sup>55</sup>

Overall, the AKP government mainly demonstrates a realist foreign policy. Yet it has also specified a balanced attitude between idealism and realism.<sup>56</sup> In this regard, the AKP implemented the UN Alliance of Civilizations' initiative, co-chaired by the prime ministers of Turkey and Spain under the UN Secretary General.<sup>57</sup> Its purpose is to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism, and encourage instead greater dialogue and understanding. Furthermore, the Turkish government demands reform of the UN system, especially criticizing the decision-making mechanism of the UN Security Council and calling for a more participatory order, underlining again the need to keep a balance between interests and values.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the AKP shows that it is trying to maintain balance between national interests and ethics; and that it is also trying to combine its interests with the common interests of regional countries based on liberal universal values.

Last, it should be underlined that as a confident regional power, the AKP is driven by economic opportunity and peace interests towards the Middle East, which can be considered a realist foreign policy. In the Middle East, Turkey is considered a significant trade and economic center, and the AKP is trying to enlarge economic cooperation through increasing trade, transportation, and direct and indirect investments.<sup>59</sup> Turkey's volume of bilateral trade with Middle Eastern countries has gained considerable momentum, reaching 65 billion dollars at the end of 2012, which is a sevenfold increase from 2003.<sup>60</sup> Before the Arab Spring, Turkey succeeded in developing good economic relations with neighboring countries. The total value of projects undertaken by Turkish contractors in Middle East countries exceeded 65.8 billion dollars by the end of 2012.<sup>61</sup> Further, one of Davutoğlu's greatest diplomatic accomplishments is considered to be creating a visa-free zone linking Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, where the four countries had agreed to move toward free trade as well as free passage among each other. However, these plans have been jeopardized because of the events of 2011.

When analyzing the interaction between foreign policy and trade relations, it is fair to say that increasing trade relations is assumed crucial for Turkey's regional role, based on its aspiration of becoming a soft power. In other words, economic power is expected to stimulate the country's political ability to shape regional relations.

Focusing on post-2011 foreign policy, it is argued that "the AKP eventually came to feel that the Arab upheavals had provided the opportunity to create a new regional order with

<sup>55</sup> Murat Yetkin, "Ortadoğu'da zamanın ruhu değişirken Türkiye," *Radikal*, October 22, 2013, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/murat\\_yetkin/ortadoguda\\_zamanin\\_ruhu\\_degisirken\\_turkiye-1156577](http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/murat_yetkin/ortadoguda_zamanin_ruhu_degisirken_turkiye-1156577).

<sup>56</sup> "61. Hükümet Programı."

<sup>57</sup> "2023 Siyasi Vizyon," Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/akparti/2023-siyasi-vizyon>.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Mevlana Değişim Programı Tanıtım Toplantısında Yaptıkları Konuşma, 23 Mayıs 2013, Ankara," [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu\\_nun-mevlana-degisim-programi-tanitim-toplantisinda-yaptiklari-konusma\\_-23-mayis-2013.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-mevlana-degisim-programi-tanitim-toplantisinda-yaptiklari-konusma_-23-mayis-2013.tr.mfa); Davutoğlu, "Vision 2023."

<sup>59</sup> Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy," 29-57.

<sup>60</sup> "Countries & Regions - Middle East," Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, [http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sa\\_yfa=countriesandregions&region=4](http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sa_yfa=countriesandregions&region=4).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



Turkey at the center.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, the AKP government assumes that regimes in the Middle East will be replaced with governments more representative of the people. Davutoğlu states that:

At the regional level, our vision is a regional order that is built on representative political systems reflecting the legitimate demands of the people where regional states are fully integrated to each other around the core values of democracy and true economic interdependence.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, Turkey is willing to play an active role in the transformations of political order in the Middle East. In short, Turkey's desire to create a regional order has not been shelved.<sup>64</sup>

#### 4. Why should Turkey Care about Regional Order?

Regional as well as global dynamics are rapidly changing, and the AKP government thinks that Turkey must be involved in influencing these transformations. The government says that when it is influential in the establishment of a regional order, regional relations will become an asset rather than a burden for Turkey. The government also argues that regional order and peace can only be realized through regional cooperation; although it accepts that the global structure is also important in establishing a new regional order, it does not want the regional order to be solely managed by global actors. Furthermore, the government does not want to limit itself to a regional role determined by the great Western powers.<sup>65</sup> With this aim, Davutoğlu has carried out intense diplomatic activities in the region and has tried to remove negative sentiments among countries. Overall, a liberalized political system and a strong economy are viewed as providing opportunities to follow an active regional policy.

#### 5. Conclusion

Turkey continues to follow a realist and principled regional foreign policy in the Middle East, and there is a convincing logic to this approach. Turkey's security and economic interests have merged, with economic opportunity and peace the driving forces of its actions, particularly trade promotion. But economic interests and trade promotion are not the sum of foreign policy; there is also value-based foreign policy.

Turkey is pursuing a foreign policy that breaks from the past, the changes have been more tactical in nature. While Turkey's interests towards the EU have decreased, it is engaging more in the Middle East. A value-based and principled policy has been repeatedly proclaimed by the AKP government. Turkey desires to play a leadership position in the Middle East, with two core aims in the regional power discourse. One goal is to build a respectable view of Turkey among the international community and to strengthen Turkey's international image as a regional player. The second goal is to encourage rapprochement between Turkey and its neighbors to develop national interests. However, with the fluidity of the regional situation, it is difficult to tell whether Turkey will reach its goals.

<sup>62</sup> William Armstrong, “Davutoğlu, the AKP and the pursuit of regional order,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Davutoğlu-the-akp-and-the-pursuit-of-regional-order.aspx?pageID=238&nID=76942&NewsCategoryId=474>.

<sup>63</sup> Davutoğlu, “Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring,” 5.

<sup>64</sup> Şaban Kardaş, “From Zero Problems to Leading to Change: Making sense of transformation in Turkey's regional policy,” TEPAV Turkey Policy Brief Series (2012); Davutoğlu, “Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring,” 5.

<sup>65</sup> Davutoğlu, “Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Political Structuring,” 4.

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