

The Historical Direction of Turkey's Foreign Policy towards the Middle East

MUSTAFA SITKI BİLGİN
Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi

ABSTRACT

The bases of Turkey's recent intense interest in Middle Eastern affairs have a long historical course and tradition. This was because its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire, was one of the biggest Middle Eastern states in history. Besides Turkey's historical and cultural ties with the region its unique geographical and geopolitical positions between the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa entails Turkey's political involvement in the Middle East.

The article mainly deals with the driving forces behind Turkey's long interest in Middle Eastern affairs thorough examining the historical direction of Turkey's foreign policy. It asserts that Turkey's renewed intense interest in regional affairs in recent years can not be regarded as a mere conjectural or a sharp brake from the past, but rather it should be seen as a continuation of its past with its evolutionary nature in which its ultimate aim is to raise Turkey's international status into a global power position. It claims that Turkey's foreign policy shows continuity and consistency though some deflections came to happen during the process of its evolution. It thus examines the historical process while at the same time analyzes the reasons behind the recent Turkish political activism in the Middle East.

Key Words: Turkey, Middle East, Western Europe, Abdülhamit II, Atatürk, Turgut Özal, R.T. Erdoğan, Ahmet Davutoğlu

Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu'ya Yönelik Dış Politikası'nın Tarihsel Yönelimi

ÖZET

Türkiye'nin günümüzde Ortadoğu'ya karşı gittikçe artan ilgisinin temelleri uzun bir tarihi geçmiş ve geleneğe dayanmaktadır. Zira, Türkiye'nin selefi olan Osmanlı devleti tarihin en büyük Ortadoğu devletlerinden biriydi. Tarihi ve kültürel faktörlerin yanı sıra Türkiye'nin Asya, Afrika ve Avrupa kıtaları arasındaki benzersiz coğrafi konumu ve jeopolitik pozisyonu Türkiye'yi Ortadoğu coğrafyası ile ilgilenmeye iten ana sebepler arasındadır.

Makale esas itibarıyla Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu bölgesiyle ilgilenmesinin arkasında yatan ana sebepleri tarihe bakarak incelemeyi planlamaktadır. Makaleye göre Türkiye'nin son dönemlerde Orta Doğu'ya olan ilgisi geçmişten çok farklı bir olay ya da konjektürel bir durum değildir. Bilakis derinliğini geçmişten alan müterakki ve evrimci bir özelliğe sahip olan bir dış politika anlayışdır ki bu anlayış Türkiye'yi bir dünya gücü durumuna yükseltmeyi hedef edinmektedir. Türkiye'nin evrimci bir özelliğe sahip olan dış politika anlayışı zaman zaman kırılmalara uğrasa da AK Parti dönemiyle birlikte zirve noktasına yaklaşmıştır. Makale, ayrıca, Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu'ya yönelik dış politikasının geçirdiği evrimin safhalarını genel hatlarıyla ele almakta ve son dönemlerde bölgede ortaya konmuş olan yoğun ilginin arka planını tahlil etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Ortadoğu, Batı Avrupa, II Abdülhamit, Atatürk, Turgut Özal, R.T. Erdoğan, Ahmet Davutoğlu

Turkey's involvement in Middle Eastern affairs has a long historical course and tradition. This was because its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire, was one of the biggest Middle Eastern states in history. In fact the Ottoman Empire, after gaining the zenith of its power, had designed a grand strategy for the Middle East region itself. This strategy was based on the idea that the strength and prosperity of the Ottoman Empire was depended on the unity of Anatolia at first and secondly the welfare and security of the Anatolia was closely connected to the unity of Middle Eastern politics and geography. This strategy formerly had been adopted by Sultan Melikşah, the third ruler of the Seljuk Empire, and then it was developed by the great eastern conqueror Yavuz Sultan Selim himself. Later on this grand strategy reached its political and strategic climax during the reign of the Sultan Abdülhamit II with the implementation of the policy of Pan-Islamism.

After the destruction of the Ottoman Empire it was Mustafa Kemal Paşa who recognized regional unity of Anatolia with that of the Fertile Crescent (Mesopotamia and Syria) regions. As Mustafa Kemal Pasha (later became known as Atatürk) was unable to compete with the British strategy in the region he abandoned the scheme of 'Turco-Arab Federation' plan.¹ After the establishment of Turkish Republic, Atatürk replaced his earlier 'Federation' strategy with a policy of good neighborhood and regional cooperation as this policy reached its climax with the establishment of the Pact of the Sadabad in 1937.

This article maintains that Turkey's renewed intense interest in regional affairs in recent years can not be regarded as a mere conjectural or a sharp brake from the past, but it should be rather seen as a continuation of its past with its evolutionary nature in which its ultimate aim is to raise Turkey's international status into a global power position. It asserts that Turkey's foreign policy shows continuity and consistency though some zigzags came to happen during the process of its evolution. This article thus deals with the driving forces behind Turkey's long interest in regional affairs and its stability and how this policy has been formulated to realize its political and strategic aims in the Middle East.

1 Mustafa Sitki Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey in the Middle East: Politics and Influence in the Early Cold War Era* (IB Tauris: London & New York, 2008), p.25.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE BASES OF TURKISH INTEREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The historical roots behind Turkish interest in the Middle East are based on a general comprehension which pursued to secure for the unity of the Middle Eastern geography. The origin of the idea dates back to Sultan Melikşah's reign who was the third ruler of the Seljuk Empire in the 11th century. He was the first greater eastern Sultan who established a grand strategy for the Middle East based on East-West dual direction. While his main aim was to maintain the territorial and political unity of his eastern empire, Melikşah also pursued a strategy of political expansion towards the West against the Byzantine Empire. Melikşah adopted a policy rested upon an understanding that the future of Seljuk Empire was closely related to the unity of the Middle Eastern geography as it had been the case during the reigns of the previous Umayyad and Abbasid Empires. Later on this policy was ruined as the Empire's territories were divided among the Seljuk dynasty. As a result the Seljuk Empire began to collapse and this caused to Mongolian invasion with a heavy catastrophic results for the Middle East. Disunity of the Middle East thus was the main factor which caused the devastating Mongol invasion took place in the region.²

Afterwards, during the domination of the Ottoman Empire, this eastern strategy was taken and developed by the great eastern conqueror Yavuz Selim Khan. Yavuz Selim's policy aimed at first to assure the stability and security of the Middle East where a region was regarded as a complementary geographical extension of Anatolia. That was why Yavuz's first attempt during his reign was to remove the Iranian danger from the region during the battle in Çaldıran in 1514. Then he turned to conquer the lands of Mamluk Empire to secure the geographical unity of the Middle East in 1517. His strategy was based on the idea that unless the unity of the Middle East was achieved it was impossible to reinforce the Ottoman Empire against a danger posed by Europe. This was the grand strategy of the Ottoman Empire based on the East-West dual tradition that it was more or less maintained until the time of the Sultan Abdülhamit II.³

2 Osman Turan, *Selçuklular Tarihi Ve Türk-İslam Medeniyeti* (Boğaziçi Yayınları: İstanbul, 1996), pp.199-233; Osman Turan, *Türk Cihan Hakimiyeti Mefküresi Tarihi*, c. 1-2 (Boğaziçi yay: İst., 1993), pp.188-216; Reşat Genç *Karahanlı Devlet Teşkilatı* (TTK, 2002); *Doğuştan Günümüze Büyük İslam Tarihi*, (İst: Çağ yayınları, 1988), pp.129-213; Carl Brockelmann, *İslam Ulusları ve Devletleri Tarihi*, (Translator: Neşet Çağatay) (TTK: Ank., 2002), pp. 143-147; Arthur Goldschmidt-Lawrence Davidson, *Kısa Ortadoğu Tarihi* (Translator: Aydemir Güler) (Doruk yay: İst., 2007), pp.135-146; Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East* (Phoenix Pres: London, 2000), p.90; Ira M Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.303-306;

3 Selahattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (MEB, 1969), *passim*, ; Feridun M. Emecen, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Yitik Hazine Yayınları: İst., 2011), *passim*; Goldschmidt- Davidson, *Kısa Ortadoğu Tarihi*, pp.193-203.

While Abdülhamit's rule represented one of the most troubled periods in the Ottoman history he was the only late Ottoman Sultan able to adopt the grand eastern strategy inherited from Yavuz Sultan Selim. In fact, Sultan Abdülhamit not only advocated his grandfather's eastern strategy but also he was able to develop it even further. He turned this strategy into a political and intellectual ideology as it became known as pan-Islamism. Pan-Islamism was an expression which aimed at bringing all the Muslims in the world within the orbit of the Caliphate.⁴

At the beginning of the 1880s as Britain, the traditional ally of the Ottoman Empire, reversed its policy from protecting the Ottoman Empire towards breaking its territories into pieces Abdülhamit reoriented foreign policy in order to ensure the survival of the Ottoman Empire. At this time the occupation of Cyprus and Egypt made a profoundly negative impact on the minds of Sultan Abdülhamit II and his officials. Abdülhamit thus turned his face to Germany which was looking for an opportunity to enter the Middle East market, and thus was ready for collaboration. Moreover Germany had no imperialistic designs in Ottoman territories except economic interests.⁵

Abdülhamit II had inherited an empire which was economically bankrupt and politically collapsed. The Empire was on the verge of dissolution as a result of many internal and external defections. In order to cope with the disastrous situation, Abdülhamit decided to take power into his own hands with absolute authority. In reality, the Sultan had managed to keep the country out of major wars and his foreign policy was largely a great success. His successors namely leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) however did not have the same qualities of statesmanship which the Sultan had possessed.⁶

After the removal of Abdülhamit Khan from the throne the Pan-Islamist concept was dropped by the advent to power of the CUP. As this party adopted a policy of Turkish Nationalism within the Ottoman territories, the idea of the unity of Anatolia with the Fertile Crescent and Arabian Peninsula thus was dropped. To begin with the CUP adopted a policy called as Ottomanism (unity of all nations within the Empire) until 1911. Thereafter the outbreak of the Turkish-Italian war directed the leaders of the party to follow the policy of Pan-Islamism as a better option. This was because the resistance of the Arabs of Tripoli to the Italian aggression and the contributions poured from Islamic communities throughout the world to assist the Ottoman Empire urged the leaders of the CUP to adopt a Pan-Islamist policy along with the policy of Pan-Turanism. As however the latter policy became dominant in Turkish politics especially after

4 Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey in the Middle East*, pp.15-17

5 Mustafa Sitki Bilgin, 'Ermeni Meselesi Üzerinde Osmanlı-İngiliz Diplomatik Mücadelesi, (1878-1894)' *Hoşgörüden Yol Ayrımına Ermeniler* (eds: Metin Hulagu and others) (Kayseri, 2009), pp.309-331.

6 Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey*, pp. 27-30; Bilgin, 'Ermeni Meselesi Üzerinde', pp.309-331.

the Balkan Wars the policy of Pan-Islamism then was abandoned. Other reasons for the Unionist leaders to abandon the Pan-Islamic policy of Abdülhamit was that implementation of this policy brought the CUP administration into an antagonism with France, Russia and England.⁷

In the meantime the leaders of the ruling party of Turkey took some drastic decisions to establish order and peace in the Empire. They took extreme measures against any opposition ideas. They wanted to establish a strong central authority over the non-Turkish elements in the Empire. However, these policies caused strong reactions in the Arab parts of the Empire. Leading Arab personalities in Basra began to oppose the policies of the CUP. Liberal and separatist ideas began to spread throughout Iraq with the efforts of British Basra Consulate.⁸

In the meantime, Anglo-Turkish relations in Mesopotamia began to deteriorate as Kuwait had long been a source of friction between the two countries in the Gulf of Basra. British manufactured arms began to be smuggled in Kuwait and Muhammerah causing to disturb the peace and stability in Mesopotamia. These all events brought the Turkish government to lose its control in the region. The other troubled province was Syria which became a centre for the rapid growth of Arab nationalism. In reality, the seeds of the idea were sown long before but not developed until the Young Turks followed the Pan-Turanian policy. Beirut was the earliest centre, later replaced by Syria.⁹

However the growing discontent among the Arab nationalists, the Arabs of Mesopotamia and people of the greater parts of Arabian Peninsula collaborated well with the Ottoman Army and fought under the Ottoman flag against Allied powers after the outbreak of the Great War. Only a small portion of Arabs of Western Arabia under Sherif Hussein rebelled against the Turks.

After the Sherif's revolt, Ahmet Cemal Pasha who had been Commander of the Fourth Army in Syria and Western Arabia was the first Unionist statesman who proposed a Turco-Arab federation scheme to Hussein. In his letter to Hussein on 13 November 1917, he urged the necessity of religious union to oppose British advances in Palestine and affirmed that the Arabs could now attain their national aims through the good will of Turkey. He made it clear that the Allies' aims in Syria and Mesopotamia would not permit the materialization of the Arab national aspirations as the released Tsarist documents had disclosed the substance of the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916

7 Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey in the Middle East*, pp.18-19.

8 British Consulate Basra to Sir Gerard Lowther, HM's Ambassador at Constantinople, 9 September 1911; British Consulate Basra to Lowther, 27 March 1912, FO 602/52; HM's Consul Basra to Marling, Constantinople, 24 December, 1910, FO 602/52.

9 See the report, Constantinople to Sir E. Grey, 4 January 1911, FO 602/52; Foreign Office Handbook, March 1919, p.12, FO 373/4/24, p.16.

and other Anglo-French imperialistic designs which planned to divide the Arab lands between themselves.¹⁰

In response to Cemal's letter, the Sherif initially thought that, subject to British approval, he might manage to bring peace between Turkey and Britain, and thereby with the Arabs, on condition that Turkey should evacuate certain territories that were to be specified by His/Her Majesty's government (HMG). However, upon the fierce opposition shown by the British High Commissioner (HC) for Egypt Hussein and his sons rejected Cemal Pasha's proposal. Following Sherif's consultation with Major Lawrence and other British officials, the Sherif's son, Feisal, replied to Cemal Pasha on a harsh line that 'nothing settles [matters] between us and Turkey except the sword'.¹¹

However, during the spring of 1918, Feisal began to suspect future Allied plans in the Middle East. In his secret written communication with Cemal Pasha, he expressed his willingness to come to an agreement with the Turks if the latter were to evacuate the Arab provinces. Upon learning of this secret communication, while the British HC for Egypt was willing to reach an agreement between the Arabs, Turks and the British. The British Foreign Secretary, however, opposed the idea on the grounds that this kind of arrangement between Turkey and Britain would jeopardize the advantages which Britain had already obtained over the latter. During this time it became clear that, because of wrong strategy and miscalculations of Enver Pasha (Chief Commander of the Turkish Armies), Turkey was to lose Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Baku and Western Persia to Britain.¹²

This was because Enver Pasha pursued a misguided strategy. Instead of throwing all Turkey's energies into the war against the British in Mesopotamia, he directed Turkish military efforts too much towards the Caucasus front. Whereas, not long before this event took place, the Turkish Army had been able to win a great victory over the British in Kut (near Baghdad) in April 1916 and eventually had captured the British Army together with its Commander, General Townsend.¹³ Because of the defeats of the Turkish Army by Britain from 1917 onwards hence the British Foreign Secretary did not want to miss the opportunity to bring the Ottoman Empire under the British occupation. Sherif Hussein and his other son Abdullah agreed with the British Foreign

10 .HC for Egypt to Foreign Office, 25 December 1917, FO 141/430. See also, Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, pp.40, 65-66. Cemal Pasha in his letter to Hussein mentioned about the Sykes-Picot agreement of October 1916, disclosed by the Bolshevik Russians in November 1917.

11 HC for Egypt to Sir Mark Sykes, Foreign Office, 13 March, 1918, FO 141/430.

12 HC for Egypt to Sir Mark Sykes, Foreign Office, 13 March, 1918, FO 141/430; Balfour, London to Brigadier General Clayton GHQ, 14 April 1918, FO 141/430.

13 Admiralty Handbook, April 1942, ADM 234/88, p.306; British Legation, Berne to Foreign Office, 11 March 1918, Weekly Memorandum concerning conditions on Turkey, FO 141/430; Seha L. Meray ve Osman Okay, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Çöküş Belgeleri, Mondros Bırakışması* (Ankara, 1977), pp. 1-5.

Secretary. It was for this reason, under the shock of the defeats in Mesopotamia and Syria, Turkey was forced by Britain to sign the humiliating Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918.¹⁴

The aftermath of the destruction of the Ottoman Empire the search for rapprochement between the Turks and Arabs continued. It was Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the leader of Turkey's Independence Movement, who inherited the legacy of 'Turco-Arab Federation' scheme from 1919 onwards. Just before the signing of the Mudros Treaty, the Arab leaders of Northern Mesopotamia and Syria met in Switzerland in June 1918 and declared that their policy would be Syrian and Arab autonomy under the protection of Turkey. During the War of Independence, Mustafa Kemal Pasha had good contacts with the leaders of Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and pursued a policy of collaboration with them against British and French domination. In letters to the Syrians of January 1921, he proclaimed that the Arabs of the area should be united against the French and promised that the Turks would soon advance to Syria to help them. Fevzi Pasha (Chief of Staff of the Turkish Army) also went to Syria to discuss with the Arab Chiefs the kinds of Turkish assistance Turkey could provide for them.¹⁵

However, as Mustafa Kemal (later took Atatürk as a surname) Pasha's plans collided with Anglo-French imperialistic designs in the Middle East he had to reorient his policy towards the Arab countries by relinquishing all claims to the lost imperial Arab provinces of the Empire except those territories composed by Turkish Muslim majority. This was especially the case when İsmet Pasha, the Turkish Foreign Minister, during the Lausanne discussions made this point clear to Naji El-Assil, the representative of King Hussein, on 6 February 1923.¹⁶

This, in fact, did mark not only a territorial separation but also ideological and political divisions between the Arab states and Turkey as the latter embarked on an extensive reform program to bring new state into the ranks of Western civilization. Moreover, the Arab revolt of 1916 against the Ottomans, though this perception did not match with the real facts and reality as explained above, made negative impacts on the minds of the leaders of the Turkish Republic about the unreliability of the Arabs while the Arab elites complained that the long period of the Ottoman rule was the reason for the backwardness of their lands. These reciprocal approaches and misperceptions though initially brought about a temporary estrangement between the two sides

14 Residency, HC for Egypt, 31 March 1918, FO 141/430

15 Lieutenant J.L. Martin, Special Intelligence Bureau, Cairo to Arab Bureau, 3 June 1918, FO 141/430. See also Salahi Ramadan Sonyel, *Turkish Diplomacy, 1918-1923: Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish National Movement* (Sage Publications Ltd: London, 1975), p.22; GHQ, General Staff, Cairo, to Major Tweedy, The Residency, Cairo, 22 January 1923, FO 141/430; HC, Jerusalem to HC Cairo, 17 January 1921, FO 141/430.

16 HC Egypt to Curzon of Kedleston, 16 March 1923, FO 141/430; HC, Egypt to Major Tweedy, The Residency, Cairo, 10 February 1923 FO 141/430; Meray, *Lozan Barış Konferansı*, Vol.I.

did not last long as Turkey started to make new political contacts with the Arab states to reinforce regional security form late 1920 onwards.

II- A REGIONAL MODEL FOR PEACE AND STABILITY İN MODERN TIMES: THE PACT OF SADABAD

The Sadabad Pact of 1937 signed between Turkey, Iran Iraq and Afghanistan was the first and foremost regional organization devised by the regional powers under the leadership of Turkey. It was set up in accordance with the regional needs and free from any foreign influence. This is why it was the long lasted strategic organization which was widely accepted by statesman of the regional states and their people as well.

This pact was a Turkish project began to start from 1920s onwards as a result of a policy aimed 'to search for security and cooperation with the Turkey's Balkan neighbors in the West and collaboration with Iran, Afghanistan and Arab states in the East'.¹⁷ With this policy Turkey first wanted to stabilize the geography around herself where she belonged to by overcoming political and strategic problems of the region and then to reinforce its international stance by undertaking a leadership role in the Middle East.¹⁸

Iraq was the first target of the new eastern policy of Turkey. This was because it was the closest Arab country to Turkey in terms of geographical, cultural, and political reasons. The first step towards developing the relationship between the two countries was taken by King Faisal when he visited Turkey in June 1926.and signed Ankara Treaty. With this treaty a number of political issues were resolved and the border between the two countries was eventually defined clearly.

The next country within Turkish orbit was Afghanistan with which Turkey had long maintained a close ties. In 1928, Turkey signed a good neighborhood treaty with this country. In time, Turkey gained a considerable influence in Afghanistan by sending there teachers and officers to train Afghanistan's military service and education system. Thereafter, Turkey approached Iran and signed a good neighborhood treaty with this country. Turkey under Atatürk's leadership continued to keep in touch with Imam Yehia of Yemen and Ibn Saud, King of Necit and Hejaz. In February 1929 the representatives of Ibn Saud paid a visit to Turkey and it was decided make a treaty between the two countries and to open an embassy in Ankara. These hard endeavors of Atatürk were to produce their fruits with the establishment of the first eastern pact namely the Sadabad Pact in 1937.¹⁹

17 Tefvik Rüştü Aras, *Görüşlerim* (Ankara: Tan Basımevi, 1956), p. 130.

18 Report on Turkey by Foreign Office, 24 Temmuz 1946, FO 371/59316.

19 Report on Turkey by Foreign Office, 24 Temmuz 1946, FO 371/59316; Translation of an article on Turkish policy in Arabia, 9 Şubat 1929, FO 141/430; Aras, *Görüşlerim*, p.132.

In the 1920s the regional powers, among chief of them was Turkey were discontented by the impacts of imperialist rivalry between the Soviet Union and the British Empire in the Middle East. In order to free themselves from the political pressures imposed upon them by the Soviet Union and Britain, there occurred a consensus among the regional states, besides each regional states' special aims, to establish a regional cooperation scheme. With the regional organization the regional states would be able to adopt more political choices serve to their interests free from foreign influence. Also this kind of regional organization would help the regional powers to take a neutral stance in case of an Anglo-Soviet clash. Furthermore, such a regional grouping would help to solve the political problems among these states and would contribute to reinforce their political position at the international arena.²⁰

Bearing in mind these considerations the Iranian, Turkish and Afghan delegations came to meet at Tehran in 15 June 1928. In these meeting these delegations not only signed new agreements and protocols but also decided to strengthen their relationship and cooperation. This represented the first crucial step towards a regional cooperation.²¹

These political conditions and environment in the Middle East, however, were to change in the 1930s. In this period the threat posed by Germany and Italy in the Middle East and the Balkans upset the status quo and power balance set up by the Soviet Union, Britain and France. These threats further reinforced the idea of establishment of a regional pact among the sates of the Middle East. With the realization of a pact the regional states would expect to have a better chance of political bargain with the states of Britain and the Soviet Union.²²

These new political conditions and international circumstances thus stimulated Turkey and Iraq to reinforce their political and strategic cooperation. In this period the support given by Iraq to Turkey's efforts of suppressing the Kurdish riots open way to further development of Turco-Iraqi relations. For This purposes King Feisal of Iraq and his Premier Nuri said Pasha paid a visit to Turkey in July 1931. Kemal Atatürk attributed a great importance to this visit by stating that:²³

20 D.Cameron Watt, 'The Saadabad Pact of 8 July 1937', in *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919-1939* (ed.) Uriel Dann, (Holmes & Meier: London, 1988), pp.333-335, 337,341,3433-44; Aryeh Shmuelevitz, 'Atatürk's Policy toward the Geat Powers: Principles and Guidelines', in *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, (ed.) Uriel Dann, (Holmes & Meier: London, 1988), p.315.

21 Watt, 'The Saadabad Pact', pp.335-336, 344. Interestingly enough in his report to the Foreign Office, the British High Commissioner in Iraq stated that Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan were closer to the Soviet Union.

22 Watt, 'The Saadabad Pact', pp. 335-336, 344-345; Shmuelevitz, 'Atatürk's Policy', p.313; Yaacov Ro'i, 'Official Soviet Views on the Middle East, 1919-1939' in *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, (ed.), Uriel Dann (London: Holmes & Meier, 1988), p.306; Lawrence Pratt, 'The Strategic Context: British Policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1936-1939', in *The Great Powers In the Middle East, 1919-1939*, (ed.) Uriel Dann (Holmes & Meier: London, 1988), pp.12-19.

23 *Atatürk'ün Milli Dış Politikası (Atatürk's Foreign Policy: 100 Documents related to Atatürk Era)*, (Hereafter cited as AMDP), (Eskişehir: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1992) pp.197-98.

The Republic of Turkey which adopted a policy of good neighborhood with all of her neighbors had sincerely wished Iraq to become a stable and prosperous country in the Middle East. Turkey and Iraq had long have historical, geographical and cultural kinship and connections and these historical ties were to strengthen the two countries' relationship. Let me say that the cordial relationship between Turkey and Iraq are growing day by day.

In response to Atatürk the King said that he fully agreed with the ideas of Atatürk and added that he wanted to further develop the relations between Iraq and Turkey. During the meeting the border issues and territorial security between were also discussed and further cooperation and collaboration between the two countries were decided.²⁴

After Iraq, Turkey turned Iran to develop her relationship. The treaty signed in 1926 was important first step towards this end. However some political border issues between the two countries were preventing further development of their relations. In order to solve these matters Tevfik Rüştü Aras, the Turkish Foreign Minister, paid a visit to Tehran in 1931. This visit did not only clarify the political problems but also resulted in new agreements. Afterwards the relationship of the two countries began to rise fast. When Aras renewed his visit to Tehran in January 1932 he and his Iranian colleague made an invitation to Iraq to set up a regional pact. Upon this call King Feisal went to Tehran and hence the three countries reached an agreement over the establishment of an eastern pact. Then the draft plan of this pact prepared by Turkey and Iran was sent to Iraq.²⁵

After some consultation among the concerned powers over the draft project the delegations from Turkey, Iran and Iraq came to meet in Geneva after the United Nations' session in September 1935. At this time the occupation of Ethiopia by Italy increased the zeal of these countries towards setting up of a pact even further. Thereafter, Turkey put pressures on both Iraq and Iran to sign a good neighborhood treaty. However the border issue over the Shatt el Arab in the Persian Gulf was not resolved and this prevented the final signature of an eastern pact. As the border issues continued to pose an obstacle before the setting of a regional pact Naji el Asil, the Iraqi Foreign Minister asked for Atatürk's good offices to resolve this matter. Upon this Aras made many attempts to resolve this question and finally he was successful in sorting out the poisonous issue between Iran and Iraq.²⁶

24 *Ibid.*

25 *AMDP*, pp.199-200.

26 Watt, 'The Saadabad Pact', p.342; Soysal, '1937 Saadabad Pact', pp.138-139; Aras, *Görüşlerim*, p.132; *Survey of International Affairs, 1936*, pp. 801-802; *Documents on International Affairs, 1937*, pp.530-531.

After the settlement of the Shatt issue, Iran and Iraq signed a treaty in mid 1937. Thereafter Muhammed Han, the Afghan Foreign Minister was invited to come to Tehran in 4th July 1937. The border issue between Iran and Afghanistan had already settled with good offices offered by Fakhrettin Altay who was a Turkish general. These hard Turkish endeavors finally brought their fruit with the signature of Sadabad Pact in Tehran by the states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan in 8 July 1937.²⁷

At the time when the Sadabad Pact was formed Turkey was regarded by the Western powers as 'the leader of the Eastern World'. This pact thus strengthened Turkey's hands for a fruitful bargain with the Western powers during the Anglo-Turkish-French political and military discussions from 1938 onwards. Before the Sadabad Pact was established Turkey had been involved in setting up the Balkan Pact in 1934. The active policy of Atatürk was further continued in the Western direction with the signature of the Anglo-Franco-Turkish Alliance in 1939.²⁸

In fact the characteristics of Atatürk's foreign policy indicate that he established a kind of an East-West 'dual' tradition in Turkey's external affairs. To explain further this point dual tradition meant that Atatürk had adopted a balanced policy between the East and West in order to follow a relatively independent policy free from foreign influence. Atatürk began to show a keen interest in Middle Eastern affairs from 1930 onwards as this policy was culminated with the establishment of Sadabad Pact in 1937. With this pact Atatürk aimed to clear up the political problems surrounding Turkey's geography and wanted to reinforce Turkey's regional and international standing as a regional power. Only after Turkey strengthened its place in the Middle East did Atatürk involve long discussions with the West in order to reinforce Turkey's position *vis a vis* the West during the discussions related to establishment of the Triple Alliance.

In essence, Atatürk, long ago, during the National Struggle era, had a plan for forming a kind of 'Turco-Arab Federation' scheme. But he had soon realized that this project was not feasible due to Anglo-French determination to control the entire oil resources of the Middle East. This led Atatürk to focus only on liberating Anatolian territories against the Allied powers. Atatürk however never fully turned his back to the Middle East as the existing literature suggests. He was partly disinterested in the region up until late 1920s at a time when Atatürk's main objective was to carry out internal reform program. Though this was the case he still continued to keep in touch with a number of states and some prominent Arab leaders such as Ibn Saud then King of Nejit, Imam Yehia of Yemen, Afghanistan, Iran and so on.²⁹

27 *Ibid.*

28 Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey in the Middle East*, p.40.

29 Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey in the Middle East*, Chapter I.

III. THE DIRECTION OF TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE DEATH OF ATATÜRK

After Atatürk's death in 1938, his successor, President İsmet İnönü, however, followed a rather passive policy in both Eastern and the Western directions. This represented an important departure from Atatürk's foreign policy. İnönü's primary objective was to search for security against the Soviet threat in collaboration with the West especially with Britain and the United States of America (USA). Even regarding the policy towards the West, İnönü was unable to follow an active policy and his passive foreign policy did not bring much success in this direction as well.

Between the years 1938-1950, after a period of inactivity regarding the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy, Atatürk's legacy was undertaken by the Demokrat Party's government led by President Celal Bayar and Prime Minister Adnan Menderes for the next ten years. The Demokrat Party not only did secure Turkey's membership of NATO but also was able to establish close relations and cooperation with the West. Demokrat Party's activism was also continued in the Balkans and especially in the Middle East as Premier Menderes was able to set up the Baghdad Pact in 1955. In fact, Menderes had taken the Sadabad Pact as a model before making any attempts to form a new regional organization. The peculiarity of dual structure, initiated by Atatürk, on the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy was therefore carried out by Premier Menderes though this structure had been abandoned by President İnönü for a period of time.³⁰

Menderes era, partly for internal political reasons and to a certain extent due to circumstances and conjuncture of the Cold War, ended with a military coup in 1960 and hence this resulted again in a short break in the dual structure of Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey again took a cold attitude towards the Middle East for a short time during the military rule. Afterwards, İnönü came to power as Prime Minister in 1961 and Turkey's indifference towards the regional affairs continued up until 1964 when the Cyprus Crisis broke out and the famous letter, which threatened to leave Turkey alone against the Soviet danger, was send to İnönü by the American President Lyndon B. Johnson.³¹

This led Turkey to search for international support in the United Nations regarding the Cyprus Question. This was because Turkey came to believe that the West unjustly and unfairly was in favor of Greece and the Greek Cypriots while ignoring the rights and the existence of Turkish Cypriots. This situation directed Turkey to look for the support of the Arab states and thus this compelled Ankara to pay some attention in Middle Eastern affairs. Turkey however was unable to pay its full attention in

30 Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey in the Middle East*, *passim*.

31 Süleyman Özmen, *Avrasya'nın Kırılma Noktası Kıbrıs* (IQ Yay.: İst, 2005), ss. 267-270.

Middle Eastern affairs until after Motherland Party led by Turgut Özal came to power in.1983.³²

Özal's period represented a new era for Turkey not only in terms of domestic perspectives but also in terms of foreign policy concerns. Özal, for the first time in modern Turkish history, changed Turkey's economic, political and social structure by adopting extensive liberal policies. As economic imperatives took primary importance in Turkey's domestic politics they had also a wide range of reflections on Turkey's foreign policy. With Özal, political and security oriented Turkish foreign policy shifted towards economic oriented external policy. Economic concerns then took primacy over the strategic and security considerations.³³

This was why Turkey's economic relations with the Arab states began to rapidly increase. From Iraq to Libya Turkish firms conducted different kinds of business especially in the branches of construction and textile industry. This hence brought about Turkey's involvement in the political affairs of the Middle East. Remarkable examples were Turkey's recognition of the state of Palestine and its involvement in the Palestine Peace Process as well as Turkey's active engagement in the First Gulf War. Özal thus not only undertook the legacy of Atatürk which took an active role in the regional affairs but also brought a new perspective on Turkish foreign policy by attributing primacy on economic interests.³⁴

The duality of Atatürk's East-West direction in Turkey's foreign affairs was also maintained during Özal's rule. Besides Turkey's involvement in Middle Eastern affairs Özal made the first attempt by making an application for Turkey's full membership of European Union (EU) in 1987. Premier Özal also developed Turco-American relationship even further especially during the second Gulf War in the early 1990s. In this crisis while the Turkish Prime Minister wanted to adopt an active involvement in the war, even a military action towards Musul-Kerkuk area the opposition parties and the Turkish military set against him and so Özal was unable to fully realize his gulf strategy.³⁵

Premier Özal eventually left the office of the Prime Ministry and became Turkish President in 1989. This marked ending of the single party's government in Turkey as coalition governments began to come to power after 1991. At this time Turkey began to face great economic problems and increasing terrorist activity led by PKK and hence this caused Ankara to focus on domestic politics. In reflection with the domestic poli-

32 Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin, 'Türkiye'nin AB'ye Katılma Sürecinde Ortadaoğu'da Sahip Olduğu Stratejik Konumun Önemi' içinde *Türkiye Avrupa Birliği İlişkileri* editörler (H Arkan-M. Kar) (Seçkin: Ankara, 2005), ss.252-255.

33 Meltem Müftüler, 'Turkish Economic Liberalization and European Integration' Middle Eastern Studies, Vol.31, p.85; H Mustafa Paksoy, 'Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerinin Gelişimi' in *Avrupa Birliği Ortak Politikaları Ve Türkiye*, (eds.) Muhsin Kar, Harun Arkan (İstanbul, 2003), pp.108-109.

34 Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin, 'Türk-İrak İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Boyutu', içinde *Irak Krizi*, editörler (Ü. Özdağ ve diğerleri), (Ankara, 2003), ss. 22-228.

35 Bilgin, 'Türk-İrak İlişkilerinin', pp.226-228.

cies, security perspectives took priority on the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy against the PKK threat and this thus caused a rise of tension on Turkey's relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran. This situation continued until late 2002 at a time when the AKP government came to power.

The AKP era, in many respects, represents a continuation of Özal's policies as the new government continued largely to carry out the liberal and reform programs of the Motherland Party. Extensive reform program also has been launched in order to liberalize education, economy, and the structure of social, political and administrative system of Turkey. To make Turkey a really democratic and industrialized country and to secure full membership of the EU has been the main motivations behind the Premier Erdoğan's reform project. Though Özal's economic oriented policy was embraced new elements have been added in the formulation of foreign policy.

Erdoğan government thus has pursued much broader political, economic and strategic objectives than its predecessors in international affairs. While its primary objective is to establish a safe and stable environment around Turkey's borders the Erdoğan government has planned to play an active role not only in regional affairs but also on the global plane. The AKP government has prepared a strategic plan aimed to make Turkey as a world power by 2023.

This plan was in fact clearly exposed in January 2008 by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the chief architect of AKP government's foreign policy, who became Turkey's Foreign Minister in 2009. He stated that:³⁶

Turkey's engagements from Chile to Indonesia, from Africa to Central Asia, and from EU to OIC will be part of a holistic approach to foreign policy. These initiatives will make Turkey a global actor as we approach 2023, the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish republic.

Since the establishment of Republic of Turkey no Turkish government had so far made such a strategic claim to raise Turkey's international status into a global power position.

Whether this plan will ever be realized must be a matter for academic debate, but the 'rhythmic' diplomacy pursued by Erdoğan and his close associates suggest that they are intent on achieving it. Besides improved relations with the Greater Middle East and the Muslim countries of the Far East, Turkey's budding ties with Russia and Brazil and its preparation for economic and political expansion in Africa are all signals that the AK Party's policy aim is to elevate Turkey from its present regional status to becoming a truly global power.

36 Ahmet Davutoğlu, 'Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007' *Insight Turkey*, vol.10, no.1, 2008, p.96.

Indeed, the basis of this policy is not without foundations. It conversely has solid arguments. The first argument is the geographical position of Turkey which dictates her to define its position as a world power. Again if we explain this with the words of Davutoğlu, he stated that in terms of its area of influence, Turkey is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea country. *'Turkey's diverse regional composition thus lends it the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously'*. This geographical location hence more appropriately fits Turkey into a world position rather than into a regional position.³⁷

The second argument is Turkey's historical legacy. Just as geography, history, too, may dictate a country to take central position. Davutoğlu described this in the following sense:

Some countries play the central country role in their region as a reflection of their cultural and historical heritage. Turkey historically has been one of such centers of attraction. It was for this reason that when Turkey embarked on a successful nation-building process in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire, it gained population dynamism through immigration from neighboring regions. The effects of having diverse Caucasian, Balkan, Middle Eastern, Iraqi Turcoman and Anatolian elements, even in small groups, are seen in everyday life in today's Turkey, where diverse cultural elements meet under the umbrella of the Turkish state. Turkey's geography harmonizes these elements. Turkey occupies a center of attraction in its region; its cultural capital, Istanbul, spans two continents and is at once a Middle Eastern, Black Sea and a Mediterranean city. Turkey should guarantee its own security and stability by taking on a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs.³⁸

The third argument is that strategic and security imperatives require Turkey to become a world power. Since Turkey's geopolitical position and its historical assets necessitate Turkey to adopt multi-dimensional foreign policy this requires Turkey to expose its existence in all parts of the world thorough all possible economic and political means. In order to realize this aim Turkey should raise the progress of its economy and industry to a level of advanced nations of the world.³⁹

This AK Party government's political program and its approximately 10 year foreign policy in the Middle East show that its policies have in many respects been a con-

37 Davutoğlu, 'Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision', p.2.

38 Davutoğlu, 'Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision', p.3.

39 These arguments in fact reflected Davutoğlu's strategic considerations based on his book 'Strategic Depth'. In spite of the fact that they are sound and rational insights they need further work for building a systematic intellectual ground which adequately explains his global power project for Turkey. These arguments need an adequate historical and philosophical framework (i.e. historical depth) which should fit and compare history and strategy of Turkey with that of the great powers of the world.

tinuation of AK Party's predecessors. Their policies symbolize an accumulation of long years of experiences and traditions of Turkish Republic which have been harvested and developed by the AK Party's government. To give an example to support this idea will make easier what I mean. One of the fundamental principles of Atatürk's foreign policy had been 'peace at home and peace in the world'. This principle corresponds to the AK Party's foreign policy principle as described 'zero problem policy towards Turkey's neighbors' though the latter has adopted much broader and multi faceted political, economic and strategic targets than Atatürk had done.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's supreme geographical and geopolitical position which connected the Middle East with the West constitutes her a fertile ground in which it could provide for enormous economic, political and strategic advantages. This is because while Turkey has deep historical, religious and cultural ties with the Middle Eastern states she has connected itself with the West thorough possession of western a style of democracy and a secular state which is the only Muslim country in NATO. These positions have made Turkey an indispensable natural bridge between the East and the West. This thus has directed Turkey to establish good relations with the West on the one hand and her involvement in Middle Eastern affairs on the other hand. As a result the geographical and historical necessities and cultural and economic factors have created a political ground where East-West dual structure has been built for Turkey's international affairs.

It is within this political frame that Turkish foreign policy makers, since the establishment of Turkish Republic, have generally formulated foreign policy based on this dual structure: while looking for a close cooperation with the West, they at the same time pursued to establish good relations in the East especially with the regional states of the Middle East. Though strategic and security imperatives were the main motivators behind the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy political and economic factors played their respective roles as well. This was the general characteristic of modern Turkey's foreign policy lasted up until the late period of the Cold War.

As the profound changing circumstances of the post-Cold war era provided a fertile ground for the rise of AK Party in Turkish politics the evolutionary nature of Turkey's foreign policy reached its zenith during its administration. As the AKP government has pursued much broader political, economic and strategic objectives than its predecessors it greatly has increased the diversity of Turkey's political and strategic options in international affairs. Furthermore, Erdoğan government brought about a

new element to Turkish foreign policy: to establish a solid balance between eastern and western directions. Most importantly this government for the first time in modern history has made a strategic claim which aims to raise Turkey's international position to a global power status by 2023.

History provides for abundant credible evidences to illuminate the evolutionary nature of Turkey's foreign policy. It shows that Turkish interest in Middle Eastern affairs has a thousand years of historical course and tradition. It dates back to 11th century with a grand strategy adopted by the Sultan Melikşah who established an East-West dual tradition for his successors. Besides religious-ideological aims namely the idea of conquest (*fetih*), the Sultan pursued broad strategic and political objectives in this region. Melikşah adopted an expansionist policy towards the West namely the Byzantine Empire in order to reinforce the safety and security of the East. However, the center of gravity of Melikşah's foreign policy was to reinforce the Seljuk Empire in the East. This strategy was developed even further by the Ottoman Sultans namely Yavuz Selim and Abdülhamit II.

In modern times it was Atatürk who set up an East-West tradition inherited from his predecessors in Turkey's foreign policy. During his rule however he shifted the political weight from East to the West as Atatürk wanted to associate Turkey with the advanced nations of the Western Europe. Nevertheless Atatürk never abandoned or neglected to develop Turkey's relations with eastern nations. Atatürk maintained that a strong Turkey in the Middle East would increase Turkey's importance in the West. That was why he used Turkey's leadership position in the Sadabad Pact to gain political advantages during the alliance discussions with Britain and France in the second half of 1930s.

The main line of Atatürk's policy was more or less carried out by his successors despite some zigzags came to happen such as during İnönü's administration. This line was fully retained first by Premier Adnan Menderes and then by Premier Turgut Özal. In fact Prime Minister Özal not only developed Atatürk's dual strategy but also did add new elements to foreign policy. Özal changed security oriented foreign policy towards economic oriented one. Economic imperatives took precedence over strategic and political targets in the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East.

After the decline of Özal's Motherland Party on Turkey's political plane, it was Ak Party which claimed for carrying out its political and economic heritage. In fact, AKP's foreign policy fully represents an evolutionary model which accumulated long years of traditions and experiences harvested and developed by its leaders. Besides, Ak Party for the first time in Turkish history has tried to establish balanced relations between the East and the West while its predecessors had given weight to either of sides. Besides

AKP's improved relations with the Greater Middle East and the Muslim countries of the Far East, Turkey's budding ties with Russia and Brazil and its preparation for economic and political expansion in Africa are all signals that the AK party's government is seeking for a well balanced relationship with the world. Bearing in mind these facts and arguments therefore it becomes clear that evolutionary character, based on continuity, progress and consistency principles, of foreign policy has always been maintained throughout Turkish history.

To sum up, Turkey had possessed a thousand years of historical past and tradition in the Middle East. Historical evidence has shown that the general line of Turkish foreign policy regarding the Middle East can be best described with its evolutionary nature characterized by continuity and consistency rather than a severe break or a profound departure from its mainstream though some deviations came to happen during the process of its evolution. The evolutionary nature of Turkey's foreign policy can only reach to its final stage at a time when Turkey is regarded by the world as a global power.