Introduction

The New Turkish Foreign Policy:

Towards an Understanding

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The new Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) has been a headline-grabber and the pressing issues surrounding it continue to ignite debate and controversy. The list of pressing issues is long enough to include: the loosening ties with the US after the fallout in Iraq-War in 2003, Turkey’s waning membership prospect in the EU, the frustration following the UN report on the infamous Israeli Flotilla Attack in 2010, the lack of support from the West for the Arab revolutions and the recent French attempt to criminalize the ‘Armenian-genocide denial’. Despite its controversial influence, such engagements have received comparatively little scholarly attention.

This is arguably in part because it is difficult to take into account the pace and nature of such events and their deeper level meanings. Turkey has never been used to enliven such a busy agenda. It had been a *status quo* power, a ‘passive player rather than an initiator of change’ observing *statis* both at the borders of the country and its ideology (hence the dictum ‘peace at home peace in the world’). It had been a devout member of western vocations and orientations of almost any sort, ‘committed to multilateral political orientation’ (Robins, 2003: 6-8). Furthermore, the workings of the TFP has been historically a product of ‘primary players’ (consisting of the government, the presidency, the foreign ministry and the security establishment), and at times ‘secondary players’ (from the parliament, media, interest groups, ethnic pressure groups and the public opinion) and policy making was ultimately a function of sound relationships among prime ministers, the military and foreign ministry bureaucracy rather than rational design (Robins, 2003: 52-89; Hale, 2000).

The new TFP has come to maturity and fruition in a period of sweeping shifts and intensely controversial new turns in world politics particularly in the Middle East where the political landscape is fast changing, shattering certainties about how things ought to be done. Responding to such a highly topical and precarious agenda, it is perhaps not surprising to see little theoretical and conceptual clarity, explorations and progress along the way. Relative dearth of academic studies notwithstanding, journalistic accounts abound in magazines and newspapers, where positions are advanced over concrete issues of the day mostly in polemical exchanges. Consequently, instead of scholarly engagement, a highly politicized and argumentative discourse often wins the day. Rather than systematically studying complexities and nuances of the new TFP, normative debate often stifle and misconceive the terms of debate on what is at stake in Turkey’s changing identity and foreign policy.

The present issue of *Bilgi* offers a collection of articles on Turkey’s new foreign policy orientations particularly in relation to its identity-changes affecting its policies and positions in world politics. In particular, contemplating whether its identity drifts from the Western values and whether Turkey is becoming a Middle Eastern state has recently become something of a cottage industry. The critics often claim that with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey is increasingly becoming a Middle Eastern state hence turning away from the contours and staple ingredients of secular-republican pro-western foreign policy making style. Some see the source of the drift as ‘pragmatist’ foreign policy outlook (e.g., Hale and Özbudun, 2010; Kardaş, 2011) while others point to the ‘inevitable’ rearrangements in Turkey’s security policy enforced by the perilous shifts in the great power interventions in the region (e.g., Oğuzlu, 2008). While some highlight the effects of international and, to some extent, ideational factors (Kösebalaban, 2011) others emphasize the role of the ongoing culture wars between the secularist/nationalist and the religious elites (Kardaş, 2009; 2012).

This collection, however, parts company with the ‘Break with the West’ argument. Instead, it brings together analyses attuned carefully to ideational, contextual and other factors at play. While it acknowledges and addresses repercussions of the Middle Eastern directions Turkish foreign policy makers have recently taken, it rejects easy categorizations that write off such new orientations as naïve diversions from a well-traversed pattern of foreign policy making. For, the new TFP reveals an emergent regional power house, which is not simply ‘shaped and shoved’ by international or regional power dynamics and/or other so-called soft, ideational fine-tuning political tactics. It also reveals a novel approach in foreign policy making: constitution of identity and interest by renegotiating universal values of liberalism, modernity and the self at the most official level, while rendering obsolete those conventional readings and deeds along the way. It is true that Turkey is not simply ‘talking’, it is ‘realistically’ repositioning / maneuvering its position and stepping back in times of necessity in relation to the changes at the regional and global levels (Davutoğlu, 2012). But the latter also crucially is what *enables* Turkey to reformulate its identity and *then* its foreign policy giving rise to a new calculus of risk and opportunities in the region. Whether it is the typical rows with Israel or the most recent dramatic u-turn in relations with Syria, Turkey is practicing its new identity and struggling to showcase its novel ethical foreign policy stance in both domestic and global politics. Turkey is simply signing its identity ‘into existence’ (Smith, 2004).

Five articles animate this special issue. They deal with different aspects of the new TFP aiming to contribute to our understanding and offer insights into new dynamics, ruptures and reconstitutions observed in the last decade or so under the AK Party government and its grandiose foreign policy posture. In the first article ‘*A Dictionary of Turkish Foreign Policy in the AK Party Era: A Conceptual Map*’, Murat Yesiltas and Ali Balcı examine new foreign policy concepts all founded and exposed by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the chief architect of the new TFP. The article maps, defines and analyzes highly popular-yet often misconstrued-concepts in use, a necessary first step in understanding the policy choices of the AK Party government. It hence underscores the conceptual ruptures in discourses of foreign policy. It is obviously important to study how new concepts set the terms of debate and constitute new meanings in opposition to the traditional, preconceived conceived cognitive maps. These concepts significantly also point to the existing historical frames of mind that clash with and feed into the new TFP.

Hasan Basri Yalçın employs an explicit theory application in his article: a structural realist analysis of the new TFP. After briefly examining the structure-agency dichotomy, he draws on contemporary neo-realist and neo-classical theoretical debates. Having identified the main dynamics of “new” Turkish foreign policy in the new era, he emphasizes the need for a consistent theoretical perspective rather than commonplace multi-causal analysis. He criticizes agent-centric models in the TFP analyses, and argues that in order to understand the transformation and the “new” of foreign policy, a structural realist framework is needed to highlight fundamental motivations, orientations and foreign policy behaviors of Turkey. He pays particular attention to the transformations in “new” understandings of TFP with particular regard to relationship between US and Turkey at two critical junctures: 2003 Iraq War and the famous 1st March Motion. He argues that in its search for autonomy Turkey wants to sustain structural status quo position while enacting active but soft options for power maximization in addressing most foreign policy issues in which the US position is not so strict.

Nathaniel Handy’s article is on history, power and politics particularly of Turkey’s shifting relations towards the Middle Eastern neighbors. Handy carefully picks up Davutoğlu as the key personality to construct a new diplomacy and culture of foreign policy under the AK Party. She applies her model by focusing on three important cases: the semi-autonomous Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq, the Syrian government, and the Iranian government. She argues that the “new” perception regarding diplomacy and culture has accelerated and took on new dimensions under the AK Party government. Fundamental to this realignment towards Middle East or reengagement, as Davutoğlu sees it, she points out that it has been a commitment to democracy and the rule of law, both domestically and internationally, that has benefited the AKP at home and abroad. The opportunities for a successful deployment of Davutoğlu’s strategic depth vision are particularly high, she suggests, especially when considering the potentials of huge democratic openings in the Middle Eastern region in the near future especially after the Arab Awakening. She concludes that the pitfalls for the AK Party, both at home and abroad, are still many and it is far from clear whether the current AKP administration will have the capacity to overcome them.

In his article, Nabi Al-Tikriti takes up a normative task for offering a new foreign policy strategy for Turkey in a rapidly changing world in order to provide stability and security in the region. To his reasoning, Turkey should work to strengthen bonds in all directions, continuing to operate to the fullest extent possible under the vision of “zero problem”, searching for opportunities to foster mutual advantage with all the states, and working to overcome the ghosts of the past. By taking into account the classical policy advice literature, after surveying various options for addressing today’s challenges, Al-Tikriti suggests a multi-lateral regional framework of action, political cooperation, economic integration, and strategic breadth. To preserve geographic flexibility, terminological simplicity, geographic ambiguity, and institutional self-confidence, he proposes a proposed entity called the “Central Union.”

Jana Jabbour’s article is concerned with the Eastern-orientation of Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party, which has been discussed by many scholars both in Turkey and international circles since the AK Party came to power and especially since Turkey’s EU prospect for membership has started to decline. By taking into account these debates, she seeks to evaluate the claim that Turkey’s Middle Eastern policy under the AKP represents a rupture with its conventional foreign policy behavior and this illustrates a “shift of axis.” Having identified current features of this policy, she nonetheless argues that elements of both continuity and rupture exist in many of the new TFP orientations. Her examination proceeds on the basis of multi-casual analysis which focuses on ideology, domestic and interest-group politics, economic transformations, and the changes in the international system. Rather than taking “shifting of axis” as given and unquestionable, she succinctly argues that Turkey is practicing “split diplomacy” or dual-tracked foreign policy characteristic of rising powers by focusing abovementioned multi-casual analysis. More to the point, she also explores the achievements and shortcomings of the AK Party’s Eastern-orientation policy and looks at the challenges or conundrums it must face in the post Arab Awakening. The author concludes that the ruling party’s first term in office (2002-2007) was characterized by minor changes within continuity: whilst the AKP leadership undeniably paid special attention to the Middle East, it was also very cautious to formulate a policy that pleases the Kemalist and liberal circles in Turkey. She argues, however, that the rupture or discontinuity has been occurring during the second and third mandates (2007-2011; 2011-present). In all, the political power accumulated by the party domestically after the 2007 elections has allowed it to exert a far more assertive, independent and self-confident foreign policy especially towards the Middle East

Along with the five original articles, this special issue also features one important and relevant book review and a review article related to the new TFP. The first one is a newly published book *Modern Turkey: People, State and Foreign Policy in a Globalized World* by Bill Park. In his review, Ali Balcı argues that along with modern Turkish politics, the book gives special attention to Turkey’s foreign policy during the AK Party rule. Balcı notes that despite the dominance of the Kemalist paradigm in Turkish foreign and security policy, Park argues that the new foreign policy has been “in stark contrast to the wary, unimaginative and cautious approach that had hitherto shaped Ankara’s engagement, or lack of it, with the outside world”. Balcı also points out that *Modern Turkey* makes an important contribution to the existing studies on Turkish foreign policy by providing a comprehensive picture of the period. To his reading, however, the book’s reliance on only English sources overshadows its value.

The second is a review article by İbrahim Efe. Efe’s review article takes his cue from *Between State and Islam: The Politics of Engagement* by Berna Turam in 2006. Efe’s review is significant in that he rethinks two themes of the book, namely the politics of Islam and its engagement with the state, particularly in the post-Arab revolution in terms of the secularism, democracy and human rights. Although the book is set in the the Turkish context, in Efe reading of Turam’s political ethnography, Turkey’s experience can bring a refreshing insight in other contexts. Efe argues that Turam provide a leeway for the Islamists to negotiate their religious freedom and seek from the state a more liberal stance towards religious demands without submitting to them.

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