

The Concept of “Middle Power” and the Recent Turkish Foreign Policy Activism

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of “middle power” and the possible applicability of this concept within the framework of Turkish foreign policy. An increasing number of publications on the subject of Turkish foreign policy attempt to frame it by using different characterizations. One of these is related to the concept of “middle power.” The new activism of Turkey in its immediate neighborhood is generally considered as an indication of a transformation in its foreign policy orientation and behavior. As a contribution to this kind of effort, this study tries to develop a comprehensive definition of the term of “middle power” and explores how this fits in with the so called “new Turkish foreign policy.” It argues that Turkey, as a regionally significant actor that permanently accumulates material power capabilities, has tried to gain a central role in the dominant international system through its role as a middle power. The study further claims that the new definition of Turkey by foreign policy elites as a “pivotal” state clearly fits the expectations of a state with ‘middle power status’. However, it also highlights that the desire of Turkish foreign policy elites is not independent from the material power capabilities that the state possesses. Recent increase in Turkish material capabilities constitutes a significant factor in shaping Turkey’s foreign policy desires.

Keywords: *Middle Power, Turkish Foreign Policy, Pro-Active Diplomacy.*

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Introduction

The recently increasing Turkish foreign policy activity, not only in its immediate neighborhood, but also with regard to most of the central issues of international politics has drawn increased attention from both academic and policy practice circles. Most of those experts involved directly with these issues believe that Turkish foreign policy is assuming a new form and they are attempting to describe the phenomenon so as to arrive at an understanding about its meaning for the coming future of Turkey and its relations with both its immediate neighboring regions and the United States. There are large numbers of definitions pertaining to this new activity in Turkish foreign policy. Several concepts like, *regional power*, *regional hegemon*, and *pivotal state* are applied to the case of Turkish foreign policy. One of these terms includes the concept of “middle power.” This study aims to contribute to the efforts of defining the current status of Turkey in world politics. It tries to understand whether Turkey can be truly considered as a “middle power.”

With this aim in mind, the study first tries to develop a working definition of the concept of “middle power.” As a concept first developed mostly by practitioners of foreign policy in countries like Canada and Australia, this concept necessitates deeper scholarly attention. The study asks the question of how a working definition of ‘middle power’ can be developed. It argues that two approaches to the concept in the literature (realist and liberal),¹ although treated as alternatives of each other, are in reality two sides of the same coin. In fact, the realist approach answers the question of whether “a state can be considered as a middle power” while the liberal approach answers the question of whether “a state considers itself as a middle power?” In order to have a better understanding of the concept and a better chance of arriving at an applicable concept, one has to take these two dimensions of the concept into account.

Based on such a view of the existing literature, the study tries to develop a working definition of the concept by combining both dimensions in an appropriate way. A state may hold enough material capabilities to consider itself a middle power but in order to take full advantage of that position, the same state should identify itself as a middle power in search of a globally autonomous position.

This concept may be applied to recent Turkish foreign policy activism to see whether one can identify it in a more comprehensive sense that

may enrich our understanding of the proactive diplomatic efforts of Turkey. The term suggests that Turkey holds enough capabilities to classify it as a middle power analytically, but more importantly, the new Turkish foreign policy leadership contemplates a more autonomously global role for Turkey. That role is more than just a regional power position or a loyal ally status as may be deemed valuable by some other great power. With its new concepts like 'zero-problem' and 'soft-power diplomacy', Turkey seems as a good fit for the 'middle power status' described above.

After this introduction, the second section of the study introduces the origins of the middle power concept. The third section reviews the literature surrounding the concept and tries to combine the key ideas in a way that will prove meaningful for the reader. The fourth section considers the applicability of the concept to the case of Turkish foreign policy and tries to reveal its explanatory power. The fifth section makes a number of concluding remarks.

The Roots of the Concept

The concept of middle powers in the international system and their behaviors has been the subject of long debate. The first use of the phrase can be traced back to the 15th century European state system. At that point of history, the Mayor of Milan was the first person to use the concept in a similar sense to how it might be employed today (Rudd, 2006). He divided the world into three types of states. These were: *grandissime* (empires) which may be called great powers or superpowers, *mezano* (middle powers), and *piccioli* (small powers). His definition of the middle power was simple. According to his definition middle powers are the states those "have sufficient strength and authority to stand on their own without the need of help from others (Rudd, 2006)."

The implication of the concept with current usage in more recent times can be found dating from the immediate end of the World War II. Canada appeared as the first nation trying to insert the concept of middle power into its foreign policy agenda. It seems that the term had been promoted by the foreign policy makers of Canada in order to increase the influence of the nation in the international arena despite its lack of certain material capabilities to compete with the traditional great powers (Welsh, 2004). Canada as a partner in the Western camp of the Cold War and as a junior partner of the United States appeared as attracted to the concept in order to create an effective foreign policy status that would elevate it to

a more influential position in international affairs than otherwise would have been the case.

According to the Canadian definition of the concept, Canada was a middle power because it was a junior partner in larger alliances and yet was actively involved in resolving disputes even outside its own region. The Suez Crisis was the first instance in which Canada found an opportunity to successfully apply its new foreign policy tools. Canada went to legitimize its policy with some basic arguments that are related to its status of power within the international system and its historical background. According to this thinking, Canada was not a former colonial power, so, it would follow neutral policies in the struggles between the colonial powers and anti-colonial movements. The neutrality of Canada was presented as a 'soft power tool'. In order to foster this image, Canada actively supported the interests of smaller nations in the United Nations and worked against the dominance of the superpowers. Another significant dimension of Canadian foreign policy was based upon her tendency to offer support for humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts around the world.

Canada was the first, but not the last, example of this sort of foreign policy making. Since then, many examples of countries which share similar positions and historical backgrounds to those of Canada began following the same path. Australia, post-apartheid South Africa, Japan, Brazil and many others are offered as the new examples of middle powers. However, the meaning of the concept almost always remained at least ambiguous. Especially because of the practice-dependent development of the concept, it is difficult to say that such developments could be expressed through the prism of a theoretically mature concept useful in offering a satisfactory analysis of the uniformity of the behavior of such states. Beyond the practical level, some theoretical work on conceptualization is required to use this concept in a meaningful sense in foreign policy analysis. In fact, the debate over the meaning and applicability of the concept has drawn significant attention from academic circles and the following section offers an effort to display the differing conceptualization of the concept in different approaches.

The Literature on the Concept of Middle Power

The concept of 'middle power' is one of the most controversial terms in the study of foreign policy. We can enumerate two basic reasons for

the dispute over the term; those are directly related to the semantical interpretation of the two words constituting the conceptual phrase: middle and power. The first one is related to its nature and origin as a relational concept. The term middle is a relative one. In order to define “middle” one has to first define “great” and small. Without identifying what is “great” and what is “small” one cannot identify the “middle.” The second problem is related to the meaning of the concept of power in the wider social sciences. The concept of power is one of the most controversial terms in social sciences. It is presented as an essentially contested concept (Lukes, 2005; Baldwin, 1989). According to this identification, the meaning of concept of power is hotly debated and means differing things for various positions that it is difficult to find a meaningful ground to locate and use it as a helpful element in social research.

Emanating from the controversies in the meaning of the two elements of the middle power concept, it becomes a central problem in what we mean exactly when we employ the term in the analysis of any country’s foreign policy behavior. When there is no reconciliation on the meaning of power, we cannot expect to reach a common understanding on the meaning of a more complex term of middle power.

Due to the ambiguity on the meaning of the concept, one may argue that there are so many definitions of the concept that is equal to the number of the analysts writing on the concept. So, it is difficult to offer a clear review of the literature on the meaning of a single concept. It seems that classifying the definition into two broad and roughly divided categories is required. The first is the *realist* approach and the second is the *liberal* approach.

Firstly, some scholars broadly described as belonging to the English school (like Holbraad, Martin Wight, and Hedley Bull [1978] generally speaking English School) try to offer a definition of middle power in a more traditionalist sense. In this approach which belongs to a broader realist paradigm, in harmony with the significance given to the relativity of power, middle powers are determined by ranking the states according to their power status in the international system. Relatively ranking the material capabilities of the states is the main idea that directs this approach. After aggregating the critical tangible capabilities of the states: geographical position, economic power, military power etc., they formulate a list of states in which some of the states are ‘great’ powers, some of them are ‘small’ powers but some of them are left as neither ‘small’ nor ‘great’ powers.

These states standing between the two points are recognized as ‘middle’ powers. In short, Carsten Holbraad (1971: 78) defines middle power as “a state occupying an intermediate position in a hierarchy based on power, a country much stronger than small nations though considerably weaker than the principle members of the state system.”

This conceptualization of the term is commonly criticized due to its ignorance of certain factors beyond material capabilities. Cooper (1993: 17) points out that “such an approach has its problems, particularly its dependence on quantifiable measures of power.” For example, it neglects the “soft power” capabilities and pro-active foreign policy behaviors of a state. These sorts of criticisms are commonly expressed by the liberal school. Secondly and alternatively, some scholars argue that middle powers can best be defined according to the nature of their behavior. Andrew Cooper, Richard Higgott and Kim Richard Nossal in their analysis of Canada and Australia define middle powers less in terms of size, geographical position, and more in terms of their technical and entrepreneurial capacities.

According to this approach, middle powers behave in certain ways that separate them from others. The main point of this argument is centered on the idea of what is called “niche diplomacy”; this means the concentration of the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ capabilities of a state on some certain issues. Foreign policies of the middle powers are characterized by the following behaviors: “their tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, their tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and their tendency to embrace notions of good international citizenship to guide their diplomacy (Evans and Grant, 1991: 19)”

In order to classify the behaviors of a middle power, Evans and Grant offer five C’s: capacity, cooperation, creativity, coalition building, and credibility. For an understanding of when middle powers have used their capacity for activist diplomacy, Ravenhill drawing on Evans and Grant offers three more C’s: context, content, and choice (1998: 313).

In short, this second liberal approach elects to define the concept of middle power using an inductive method which requires inference from behaviors manifested. However, this approach also seems to encompass a central problem that may be labeled in simple terms “reductionism (Waltz, 1979).” In a commonly recognized way of studying social sciences, creating concepts serves to explain a given phenomenon. For that reason, a concept is generally perceived as an analytical tool which has an explana-

tory power. However, in this intuitivist definition of the concept of middle power, a reverse direction seems to be followed that makes the concept of middle power useless as an analytical tool. If one defines an independent variable according to a dependent variable, all outcomes will be dependent upon the dependent variable. That said, a vicious circle which simply and tautologically means X is X since X is X. Middle powers are middle powers since middle powers are middle powers. For example, take a state that follows niche diplomacy or soft power policies; despite being the most powerful state in the system. Can we call that state a middle power? Of course, not. Such a description would miss the real material basis of the capabilities of a state.

It seems that both approaches have their own problems in explaining what the concept of middle power means. However, this does not mean that they are totally meaningless in the study of foreign policy. This study argues that both approaches are two different dimensions of the same issue. While the realist approach tries to answer the question of what is middle power, the liberal approach tries to highlight middle power activism and activities. The first one is related to the real power status of any state, the latter is related to the willingness of that state to follow middle power policies. In short, the first one is the answer to the question of whether a state can be considered as a middle power; the second one answer the question as to whether that state considers itself as a middle power. These are two different dimensions of foreign policy. The former is related to the determinist approach to foreign policy while the latter is related to the voluntarist approach. The first is the current position and the second is the position that is desired. Reality is dominant in the first while willingness is dominant in the second. The first is related to the identification of the analyst while the second is related to the self-identification of the state.

So, a study which will focus only on one of these dimensions is likely to fail in drawing the whole picture which reflects both current identification and expected self-identification. This study, for that reason, offers combining the two approaches to some extent in which the arguments of both sides will not conflict with each other. Therefore, in order to name a state as a middle power, one has to assess both dimensions. A state can be counted as a middle power if its capabilities rank among the great powers and small states. A state can be considered as following middle power status if its policies aim at having a distinctive autonomous position in world politics.

If we turn to the roots of the concept, we can easily draw a conclusion. In fact, the states which developed the concept for the first time were trying to increase their influence more than their material capabilities would allow them to feasibly exert. For this reason we can argue that in order to be defined as a middle power a state must use some other dimensions of power creatively. If we want to summarize this phenomenon in one sentence, it has to create a difference in the international system with its distinctive stand on some specific issues. Following the paths drawn out by great powers cannot satisfy a middle power because it means the lack of subtle strategies which would be applied to create its difference. Based on this 'created difference' it can produce an active foreign policy in which it is not only the object of international affairs but also sometimes may succeed in becoming its subject. Following the great powers lead, makes these states part of the *great powers'* world vision, not their own. Therefore middle powers neither balance² nor bandwagon³ great powers. They try to find subtle strategies that could open new maneuvering spaces as status seekers (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010).

Turkey as a Middle Power

The study argues that from both material and soft power dimensions Turkey can be considered a middle power. It seems that the Turkish economy, its geographical position, dynamic population, and military capabilities designate Turkey as a country which stands somewhere between the status of great powers and small states. From the perspective of soft power indicators, it seems that Turkey desires to take a position in world politics even more than middle power status. We know that the new Turkish foreign policy elites tend to define Turkey as a central power (Davutoğlu, 2008), with its capability and desire to act independently in its immediate neighborhood and even in the international arena. However, this study also attempts to show the relation between Turkish material capabilities and foreign policy aims. The new identification of Turkey by foreign policy elites as a more autonomous actor is directly related to its new strength as a result of her improved economic situation. Turkey is no longer a country with a fragile economy which is unable to support its foreign policy aims. Otherwise, Turkey could not dare to imagine to define such a central position for itself, were it suffering from economic problems as was the case for instance during the nineties.

Since this study is trying to identify a specific kind of foreign policy behavior it needs to draw a large picture of foreign policy behaviors and outcomes instead of focusing on some specific foreign policy cases. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to provide enough support for each event. Instead of focusing on a specific case, the study tries to give a broad and rough picture of the foreign policy orientations and behaviors of the Turkish government. In this respect, the study needs to deal with many issue areas that are difficult to cover in-depth. But since it tries to identify a specific foreign policy mentality it will try to provide numerous short examples from different cases. In the following sections, the first and second dimension of the concept of middle power will be evaluated with respect to Turkish foreign policy.

Material Capabilities Dimension

Many contemporary and comprehensive studies on Turkish foreign policy explicitly or implicitly assume Turkey to constitute a middle power. Baskın Oran (2001) and William Hale (2000) in their commonly-used textbooks on Turkish foreign policy present Turkey as a middle power. They generally use the material power capabilities of Turkey to demonstrate its status in the international system. But their analysis does not include second dimension of the concept that is related to the desire of a country to play that role. Some others use the terms of regional and multi-regional power concepts which are also related to and derived from the middle power assumption (Kirişçi and Rubin, 2002).

However, a small number of studies attempt to measure the validity of that assumption. Barlas (2005) in her historical evaluation attempts to measure whether Turkey could have been regarded as a middle power or not in the 1930's using the second dimension, while Baç and Yüksel (1997) examine the validity of the same assumption for the 1990's using the first dimension. Gareth Winrow (2005) defines Turkey as both a middle and regional power. Ziya Öniş (2003) also defines Turkey as a middle and regional power turning from coercive regional powership to benign regional powership. Both Winrow and Öniş apply the second dimension. Hickock (2000) and Erickson (2004) go one or more steps further and argue that Turkey is a potential regional hegemon mainly on account of her military capabilities.

From the material capabilities perspective, we might enumerate some basic indicators like population, GDP, military expenditures, and geographical location. Since there is no strict definition of power,⁴ there is no exact power index in the study of international relations.⁵ However, taking some of the measures into consideration might be helpful in order to give a rough estimate of the power status of Turkey.

Turkey with its estimated 78,785,548 population stands as the 17th largest among 235 states worldwide. A closer evaluation of the population reveals its young and dynamic nature that is argued by most of the analysts to be an important asset of Turkish power. Despite the chronic instabilities of the Turkish economy in 1990's, Turkey seems to be recovering economically. According to 2010 data, Turkish GDP measured 960 billion dollars and figure places it in 17th position in the world rankings. Based on the real growth rate with 8.2 %, it stands as the 16st (CIA, World Factbook).

Perhaps the most important aspect of Turkey's power is related to its military strength. According to many analysts, Turkey stands as one of the most important military power in the region and also with respect to the EU with its large number of army and its mobility (Erickson, 2004: 129). Turkish military expenditure per year is equal to 5.5 % of the total national budget according to 2005 estimates. With that figure it stands as the 17th largest allocator of funds to military expenditure (CIA, World Factbook). Turkey is also considered as an important actor due to its geopolitical position as a bridge between Europe and Asia. As a country located close to different strategic areas Turkey was always considered as an important asset of great power rivalry.

Beyond these facts, some qualitative measures of Turkish capabilities should also be included in such an analysis. On the economical side for instance, the Turkish economy stands as an important part of its material capabilities. During the last financial crisis which heavily affected even the most powerful economies of Western countries seems as not affecting Turkish economy. With its regulated financial institutions since 2001 crisis Turkish economy has displayed a powerful stand. This economic well-being has influenced most of the other power indicators. It would not be surprising to see that Turkish military power is increasingly becoming more competitive compared to its rivals. Additionally a stable domestic political arena controlled with a stable and powerful single party government is another asset of Turkish capabilities that increases its capacity to act in an organized way with a single powerful voice.

These are some important indicators of an argument which suggests that Turkey can follow middle power policies if it possesses the required willingness. These indicators do not address the whole story regarding middle power status. However, they can be accepted as enough evidence of the necessary criteria to be met; that is being an independent actor is at the heart of the definition of the concept of middle power. These indicators demonstrate that Turkey, for its own well-being, to a great extent has the ability to depend its own capabilities.

Distinctive Policies of Middle Power Status

What is more striking and surprising for analysts interested in Turkish foreign policy is mostly concerned with the new identification of Turkish foreign policy aims. Some analysts tend to argue that Turkey is defining a position for itself that is difficult to sustain with the available power basis of the country (Altunışık, 2008). This is a controversial issue and requires special attention. The aspect we are dealing here is not about the sustainability of this new status in the long run but the current position of Turkish foreign policy orientation. It seems that Turkey is holding enough material capabilities to characterize it as a middle power. Beyond that, perhaps more importantly, new Turkish activism in foreign affairs illustrates that Turkey is increasingly playing the role of a middle power even though the Turkish leadership would desire even more than that.

Turkey, as expected from a middle power, tends to broaden its foreign policy perspective by creating differences through its new diplomacy and with its new conceptualization of relations with its neighbors. The Turkish leadership of the current AKP Government tends to conceptualize its new foreign policy perspective around the concept of “zero-problem” (Öniş, 2011). According to this conceptualization Ankara wishes to sustain an atmosphere of stable international relations in its close neighborhood. Aware of the problems that were produced by the conflicting relations between Turkey and its neighbors that previously served to drag Turkish efforts into unproductive conflicts rather than producing a full scale foreign policy vision, the new government, by broadening Turkish foreign policy perspectives, wishes to build sustainable and manageable relations with its neighbors (Hale, 2009). This idea of zero-problem diplomacy is based particularly on building interdependence in the economic sector that is expected to decrease the number of problems in the region

(Renda, 2011). Otherwise Turkish foreign policy makers would be dealing with small-scale problems and would be unable to develop a convenient and compatible vision which would increase Turkish effectiveness in the entire globe. Therefore, the 'zero-problem' target of Turkey can be viewed as a tool of directing Turkish capabilities to broader issue areas rather than focusing on unproductive regional conflicts. As expected from a middle power, Turkey aims to broaden its scope beyond its close regions to become an actor of the wider international system.

Another important asset of new Turkish foreign policy is related to its search for soft power (Altunışık, 2008). It seems that Turkish leadership as a model tries to provide a solution for the paradoxical relation between security and freedom. As a traditional paradox of human life, it is commonly accepted that increasing security requires narrowing the field of freedom. As experienced in the last global example, the world of 1990's was characterized as the world of enlarging the field of freedom through the leadership of the United States. In the words of Francis Fukuyama (1992), history was coming to an end and a free world was being established. However, after September 11 this vision of a free world started to vanish. A return to the security-oriented gloomy world seems to extinguish the hopes for enlarging the scope of freedom in the world. So, many countries around the world, the United States as the foremost and most important example, moved towards increasing the security anxieties based on worse-case real politic perceptions.

In the security oriented context of post-September 11, while Turkey enlarges its areas of movement for freedom areas in domestic politics through the democratization process, it also desires to use this as an asset in building its foreign policy. Thanks to the Europeanization process, since the late 90's Turkey has entered into a process of democratization. Due to increasing pressures from the European Union and some domestic dynamics, Ankara started to adopt European norms. Of course, there are still some points on which the European Union expects developments. However, up until now, Turkey created an environment that is more freedom-oriented than before. All these achievements realized by changing the old hard security image of the country have won sympathy around the world. Turkey has established itself an example of a well-functioning democracy in the Muslim world, and is repeatedly illustrated as a possible model for other Muslim countries.

In accordance with these domestic developments, Turkey attempted to create a new type of diplomatic style that is pretty much different from both its earlier practice in the 1990's and the fashion followed around the world after September 11. While the Western countries increased the level of border controls, Turkey signed reciprocal agreements with a large number of countries to abolish visa regulations.

Turkish foreign policy makers started to emphasize the 'soft power' dimension in international relations and pursue a pro-active diplomacy (Davutoğlu, 2008). Compared to earlier periods Turkey gained a more central role in the international affairs. As a consequence, many world leaders, some of them for the first time in their history, visited Turkey. As an example the visit paid by Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis to Turkey on 23-25 January 2008, marked an important milestone in bilateral relations as it represented the first official visit in almost 50 years from Greece to Turkey at this level (Kibraki, 2008).

In its immediate region, like many other countries, Turkey had some conflicting interests with its neighbors. Just for a little islet Turkey and Greece came close to a war in 1994. The relations between Syria and Turkey were not much better than the Greece case. It also had problems with Armenia and additionally with the wider international Armenian diaspora. In all these cases Turkey as the stronger side of the conflict did not hesitate to follow policies based on its hard power, especially in the nineties. As a consequence, fairly or not, Turkey had displayed an image of hard power country diplomacy in its region during that era.

However, by the late 1990's, Ankara seemed to relax its relations with its neighbors even before the term of zero-problem policy was invoked. A peace process between Turkey and Greece after the earthquakes in 1999 in both countries was started by the leadership of the minister of foreign affairs on both sides. Turkish and Greek Foreign Ministers, Ismail Cem and Andreas Papandreu based on their own friendship, tried to consolidate new forms of relations. In 2003, Turkey perhaps for the first time in the history of Cyprus took bold steps in order to reunify the island. Turkish Government explicitly supported the Annan Plan which intended to create a state based on two equal communities. This new approach positively contributed to the Turkish foreign policy image which was previously considered as constituting a stumbling block to a lasting solution. In a referendum held in 2003, the Turkish community in Cyprus voted in favor of the island's unification while the Greek community rejected the plan. This

development can be considered as reversing the formerly stereotypical images of the conflict. Since then, the Turkish side is no longer viewed as the party blocking a reunified solution for the Cyprus case.

In the case of Syria, after the extraction of terrorist PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from Syria, a rapprochement process started. High-level diplomatic visits between the two countries took place after an absence of long decades (MFA, Turkey). The new policy developed by Ankara was aimed at creating a close relation with Syria that would increase trade and create a stable diplomatic relationship. It seems that after the onset of what is generally called “Arab Spring” Turkish policy towards Syria experienced another turn more in favor of a middle power status. Since the early days of AKP Government, Turkish leaders supported the idea of democratization in the Middle East as would be expected from a middle power. However, because of the assumed difficulty of bringing about fundamental change in the Middle Eastern regimes, the Turkish desire for democratization was only expressed on the discursive level. Turkish leaders at different levels repeatedly addressed the need for democratization to guarantee a stable region.

After the start of “Arab Spring” it seems that Turkey, as a middle power, wants to take a more creative role in this process. Instead of talking to Arab leaders Ankara has tried to appeal to the Arab streets by using soft arguments like democratization, human rights, and freedom. Turkish leaders consider the Turkish model as an asset in building a better image of Turkey in a dynamic area. The new context of democratization in the Middle East is viewed as an area which provides the opportunity of increasing the popularity and effectiveness of Turkey. Therefore in the cases of Syria, Egypt, and Libya, Turkey has tried to gain a middle power status by rejecting support of either authoritarian regimes or Western practices. In order to build an autonomous position Turkish leaders have criticized both Western states and Arab dictators. In the case of Libya for instance Turkish government repeatedly criticized a military operation until it gained some control and influence over it. Turkish policy makers have attempted to display an image that was much more about rescue than military operations. Thousands of Turkish and non-Turkish survivors were carried into Turkey as a safe zone. In some cases, Turkish leaders argued that Western attempts in the region are related to the politics of oil while the Turkish position is related to the humanitarian side of the issue. This is the area where Turkey tries to build a distinctive position. It creatively attempts to

find a position which promotes an alternative vision for the new forces in the Middle East. The discussion about the possible achievements of this approach is a controversial issue, but the Turkish stand is clearly distinctive and aimed at creating a different image.

Another illustrative case is related to Turkey's foreign policy behavior during the 2003 crisis over Iraq. Turkey, for more than a half century, was a loyal ally to the United States. In 2003 when the Bush government decided to invade Iraq, it demanded to allow American troops access from Turkish territory. As the sole superpower and an old ally of Turkey, the United States officials were confident to receive the expected right of passage. However, despite high levels of US pressure, Turkey denied to allow US troops the right to use its territory. This event was shocking to Turkey's ally (Gunter, 2005). Beyond that Turkey became the initiator of the meeting of Countries Neighboring Iraq (Yeşiltaş, 2009). It was a surprising development in the history of Turkish-American relations. Turkey not only rejected the US demands but also acted as an equal actor.

If Turkey had not been in the process of defining itself as a middle power that was actively seeking an autonomous position, it could well have followed a policy in favor of American expectations (Taşpınar, 2011). But it seems that Turkey was no more defining itself as a loyal ally; focusing foremost on the Northern Iraq issue and the problem of an independent Kurdish state in the Northern Iraq. Of course, these were some central issues in Turkish foreign policy construction (Oğuzlu, 2008). But more importantly it seem that Turkish foreign policy makers were interested in broader issue areas and took the entire Middle East policy as its overriding final goal. In accordance with that new identification and aim, Turkish foreign policy behavior began to actively seek the construction of an image that was more in favor of regional stability and realistic expectations. As a loyal ally of the United States, Turkey had to follow some hard policy choices in its neighboring region during the Cold War. That loyal ally image of Turkey was stigmatized in the region, alienating it to Middle Eastern realities and creating a vicious circle which in turn repeatedly increased Turkish dependency on American preferences (Davutoğlu, 2001). As a new middle-power actor, Turkey decided to follow a foreign policy vision that would create a compatible image with other actors in the region.

According to the new conceptualization of Turkish foreign policy, Turkey is no more defined as the southern wing of the NATO alliance as was the case during the Cold War or as a bridge between the West and

the East as it was the case in the nineties. Turkish leaders define it already as a central power. According to this new identification, Turkey is a new actor with more autonomous powers. It is neither a front of the Cold War nor a bridge passively connecting two different entities as a passage for some other actors. It is defined as an attractive center with its own broader foreign policy goals.

According to this new understanding, Ankara aims to build complex alignments with large numbers of actors rather than limiting its choices to a small number of great powers. In its region, Turkey wants to be an indispensable actor of all political processes. With that aim in mind, Ankara searches for opportunities of mediation between conflicting parties not only for its close neighborhood but also for global issues. It offered to play a role in mediation attempts between Israel and Palestine for a long time. In the case of the Iranian nuclear energy issue, Turkey and Brazil thanks to their position on the United Nations Security Council succeeded in following an alternative path (Turan, 2010). These kinds of efforts can be viewed as significant examples of niche diplomacy which aims to fill gaps in the international politics by providing a 'third way'.

Another example which shows Turkey's new broadened foreign policy agenda can be found in the attention paid to African countries. Unlike a regional actor and more like a middle power, Turkey pursues its interests even in faraway regions. Turkish humanitarian organizations and state-directed organizations are taking part in humanitarian assistance in the region ranging from donation to providing clear water for African peoples (Özkan, 2010).

It seems that Turkish foreign policy in recent years can be described as a middle power approach in terms of both material capabilities and foreign policy goals. Turkey with its renewed self-identification and foreign policy orientation aims to fill the gaps in international politics through creative diplomacy. It aims to increase its diplomatic capabilities by directing its efforts to those ignored areas. These kinds of efforts give Turkey a middle power status which tries to gain a higher level of significance that would not be acquired using only hard power capabilities. However, that does not mean Turkish foreign policy aims are divorced from its material capability basis. In contrast, they are strictly shaped by the available material capabilities.

The last decade's economic well-being played a decisive role in shaping the new goals of Turkish foreign policy. In order to imagine such a

new role in international politics, economic development is a precondition. Without such a strong economic position Turkey would be unable to describe its status in such an ambitious way. Consider for instance the nineties. The Turkish economy had experienced recurring economic crises during that era. Under these conditions, no one would have considered the possibility of taking these kinds of steps. Any Turkish government hopelessly in need of foreign loans and dependent upon stand-by agreements with the IMF would have been able to participate or organize humanitarian assistance for Africa. Newly available material capabilities played a productive role in shaping Turkish leaders' minds with new ideas and directions. The creativity or activism of Turkish diplomacy is not independent from its material capabilities. From this perspective, it seems that Turkey stands as a middle power with both its abilities and aims.

Conclusion

The concept of middle power defined through combining liberal and realist perspectives contributes to creating a working definition. Otherwise, on the one side, the realist definition of the concept ignores non-material bases of power, while on the other side, liberal definition turns to be a tautological one. Therefore, this study has offered a definition of the term based on the core points of both schools. It has covered material capabilities, but at the same time allocated substantial attention to the soft dimension of the concept.

The recently increased Turkish foreign policy activism has been evaluated in accordance with the definition of the term provided. It seems that conceptualizing Turkish foreign policy around the term of middle power contributes to our understanding of recent Turkish foreign policy aims and behaviors. As a middle power in the international system Turkey tries to increase its international effectiveness by using foreign policy tools that are ignored by great powers and focusing on issue areas those are not addressed by the great powers. Turkey with its broadened foreign policy perspective acts more like a global actor rather than a regional power. Even in the cases of foreign policy issue areas that are under the focus of the great powers, Turkey tries to develop creative alternatives which can be considered as a valuable way of creating distinctiveness in Turkish foreign policy.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The identifications as Realist and Liberal schools in defining the concept of middle power try to highlight that one side deals with material capabilities while the other mostly deals with non-material dimension of the concept.
- 2 In contrast to the expectations of balance of power theories middle powers are not expected to balance since they lack required capabilities to do so and they are aware of the costs of balancing behavior under these conditions. For balance of power theory and its derivatives see: (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987).
- 3 Middle powers are not expected to bandwagon with powerful actors since that behavior is by definition limits middle power activism. For the band wagoning argument, see: (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008; Wohlforth, 1999).
- 4 For the difficulty of defining the concept of power, see: (Baldwin, 1989; Barnett and Duvall, 2005).

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