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The Impact of Self-Orientalism on Türkiye's Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal how self-Orientalism affects relations between states in the Middle East by analyzing Türkiye-Middle East relations. It argues that Türkiye's foreign policy towards the Middle East has mainly been based on self-Orientalist views of the founding elites of the country, the impact of which will likely continue into the future. There has been hostility between those who preferred a holistic self-Orientalism and those that supported a technological-only version. While the latter is not Occidentalist, it argues that relations with the Arab-Muslim world can be improved without being anti-West. The other side, complete self-Orientalists, see Middle Eastern culture as backward, thereby alienating themselves from the region. Moreover, efforts to be an EU member have complicated debates about self-Orientalism as Türkiye could be considered to be part of the Occident. Available literature is systematically reviewed.

Keywords: Middle East, Turkish Foreign Policy, Orientalism, Self-Orientalism, Arab World, Occidentalism

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Self-Orientalizmin Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu Politikasına Etkileri

Öz

Bu çalışma Türkiye-Ortadoğu ilişkilerini self-oryantalizm çerçevesinde analiz ederek kavramın ikili ilişkileri nasıl etkilediğini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Türk dış politikasının Ortadoğu'ya yaklaşımının genel olarak self-oryantalist olduğunu, söz konusu yaklaşımı Türkiye'nin kurucu elitlerinin başlattığını ve yaklaşımın gelecekte de devam edeceğini öne sürmektedir. Çalışma diğer yandan self-oryantalizm tartışmalarının da paralelde devam edeceğini öngörmektedir. Tartışmada iki taraf bulunmaktadır. Bir taraf topyekün batılılaşma ile muasır seviye gelineceğini iddia ederken diğerı sadece teknolojik değişimin yeterli olacağını savunmaktadır. Çalışma Cumhuriyet tarihinde zıt iki görüşe mensup hükümetlerin Türkiye-Ortadoğu ilişkilerinin mezkur görüşler çerçevesinde nasıl şekillendiğini detaylı olarak analiz ederek çıkarımlarda bulunmaktadır. Hususen Avrupa Birliği üye adaylığı ve muhafazakar güçlü liderlerin ilişkiler üzerindeki ilişkisine deñinilmektedir. Çalışmanın hazırlanması için literatür taraması yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ortadoğu, Türk Dış Politikası, Oryantalizm, Self-Oryantalizm, Arap Dünyası

Introduction

Having been dominated by the Ottoman Empire for centuries, the Middle East came under British and French rule, mandated in the aftermath of World War I. The mandates lasted until the last emirates in the Persian Gulf were given their independence to found Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE in 1971. When modern Türkiye was founded on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, it separated from the Arab countries not only physically but also culturally. The founding father, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, initiated a top to bottom revolution that cut the ties of newly formed country with its past, its neighbors, and the former political system. Ataturk and his establishment conceived of a secular Türkiye divorced from Arab culture and Islam flanked by pan-Turkish movements located in the Caucasus and the Balkans. In Mardin's words (1971: 202): "The new regime targeted the values of the Ottoman *ancien régime*." Thus, the new Republic introduced

new reforms to modernize and Westernize the country, such as abolishing the caliphate and sultanate and introducing the Latin alphabet—among the many radical changes made for the sake of the Westernization process. Beyond westernizing, the Turkish Republic tried to uphold the status quo by not interfering in conflicts even if they were more or less apropos Türkiye (Oran, 1996: 353). Together with the about face westwards, there emerged a contempt against the Arab World, the ruling elites saw them as obscurantist, inferior, backwards, and traitors that stabbed Türkiye in the back during World War I (Aydin, 2004: 12). This perception continues among secular Turks and more or less still shapes Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East. On the other hand, the Arab street had had similar hostile sentiments against Türkiye even before they seceded from the Ottoman Empire (Turan, 2012: 66). Especially when Young Turks took power in the early 1900s, some of their anti-Arab policies estranged Arabs from Turkish rulers (Carley, 1995: 5). In addition, some Arab tribes' alliance with foreign powers against Ottomans were never forgiven by Turks. Thus, they smeared each other with stereotypes such as 'the terrible Turk' and 'the deceitful Arab' (Cerami, 2013: 132; Dinç and Yetim, 2012: 68). Since it was like a divorce, both sides became the farthest to each other despite being neighbors (Çeliker, 2018: 649). Thus, as Duran and Özdemir (2012: 183) contend, Türkiye and the Middle East are both too close and too far from each other.

Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East (or generally the Arab street) has not changed since the foundation of Türkiye except for some attempts made by rightwing and Islamic governments. The policy has two basic layers, at the bottom of which there is the Westernizing ideology (pro-Western, secular, and anti-Islamic/Arab) that never changed. Overall there is the principle of status quo (non-interfering with external issues), which occasionally changes due to shifts in ruling parties, geopolitical conditions, or economic crises. Two leaders, Turgut Özal and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, did not only abandon the status quo but also got involved in regional conflicts by sending armies or arms to conflict zones. However, their policies did not and may not take roots as the idea of staying away from the region still prevails in Turkish politics. Establishment still reflects on whether or not to get involved in Middle Eastern affairs is desirable.

This study asserts that Türkiye's relations with the Middle East are both a case of self-Orientalism and Orientalism. Turkish elites alienate themselves from neighboring Arab and

Muslim countries since they are assumed to be Orientalist. In addition, besides shifting towards the Occident and integrating culturally with Europe, Turkish rulers and intelligentsia have been of the opinion that they are situated in the West geographically, since the Eastern Thrace region of Türkiye is in the European continent. When Türkiye has been negotiating to be an EU member, the claim that the Turkish state was in Europe is convenient. Both being 'of and in Europe' has been a good trump card in the hands of Türkiye's rulers to assert both Orientalism and self-Orientalism. Finally, as will be explained below, Türkiye's self-Orientalism was stubborn, exaggerated, and excessive, resulting mostly in a zero-win game despite that there has been no apparent loss.

The goal of the study is to reveal the impact of self-Orientalism and part-Orientalism in the foreign policy of Türkiye through analyzing negative and positive aspects of a reconstruction of the Middle East.

The methodology of this article leans on reviewing any available literature. Our research starts with the theoretical section, followed by the general overview of relations beginning from the post-Ottoman era to date. The third section will be dedicated to the basic arguments of the research.

Orientalism and Self-Orientalism

Conceptualizing the relations between the West (here: the Occident) and the East (here: the Orient) has been ongoing, but it is Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' that has more recently dominated the literature. Said based his concept on studies by other Western scholars, who had debated the discrepancy in Occident-Orient relations long before he would. For example, Fanon (1964) called for an African revolution to emancipate the whole continent from colonizers, after he had witnessed the asymmetric and unjust relations between the colonizer and the colonized. In addition, Foucault's thoughts about discursive construction influenced Said. Eventually, Said, a Christian Palestinian who himself felt the brunt of discrimination, wrote his famous book called *Orientalism* in 1978. His book most likely was greatly a reaction to exclusionary behaviors against himself.

Orientalism, according to Said (1978), is the way through which the West dominates the East by knowledge. He also conceptualizes Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’ (Ibid:12). The West’s knowledge about the East (Orient) is self-produced through discursive appropriation. As per this knowledge, the East is the other, living in a geographical space created by the West. In addition, the Oriental man is stereotyped as “irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine and sexually corrupt (Said 1978; Macfie, 2000: 4).” What is more, the identified East by the West is an enemy, thus, besides being underdeveloped, the East is also a foe that must be fought against. Therefore, since Eastern people are uncivilized and do not have the capability, it is the self-proclaimed obligation of the ‘humanist’ West to bring democracy to the ‘despotic’ East through wars, media, printing, and so forth. In Said’s words, the West systematically establishes the Orientalist discourse to “manage and produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period (Said, 1978: 3).”

Based on Said’s and many other scholars’ views, it can be held that Orientalism is a fictional geography, where poor, rude, and underdeveloped non-Western communities with different skin colors and cultures live. The West is supposed to be superior since they are more developed, smart, decent, polite, and so forth. In addition, as per the Orientalist view, it was Western powers that colonized/ruled Eastern lands for centuries (not vice versa), without a shred of apparent evidence shown as the former’s superiority. In such an inferior environment, the Oriental man is expected to imitate and be inspired by the West in order to attain to their level. What if the Orient rises to the Occident’s level or even surpasses it? For example, was Japan an Oriental country in the 20th century? What about today’s China and South Korea? Should they be regarded as new members of the Occident, the best Orientals, or a sign for the beginning of the defeat of the Occident? Is Orientalism only related to culture or power? Which criterion should be taken into account when categorizing states? Only geography? If the sole criterion is culture, how will German culture be supposed to be superior to the Japanese one? As the East is getting stronger on account of the West, the next debate about the Occident and the Orient dichotomy will probably be more complicated. . .

On the other hand, Orientalism itself is not immune to criticism. While scholars agree that Orientalism is the construction of the East by the West, a majority of them including Dirlik (1996), argue that the Orient participates in its construction, an act that has been conceptualized as self-Orientalism. According to Kobayashi, Jackson and Sam (2017: 5), the term refers to "The willful (re-)action of non-Western individuals and institutions to 'play the Other' – that is, to use Western portrayals of the non-West – to strategically gain recognition and position themselves within the Western-dominated global economy, system and order." For Schafer (2009: 31), the East tries to construct its subjectivity under the gaze of the West as a response to the process of objectivization. In addition, Bhabha (1994) argues that Western colonial power is not absolute but hybrid and ambivalent, contending that the colonized people resist oppression through specific acts such as 'colonial mimicry' and 'sly civility'. Overall, self-Orientalism is the Orientalizing of the Orient by Orientals during the process of modernization. In self-Orientalism, the Oriental man acknowledges all constructions of the West and tries to reach the level of the latter. In other words, by way of example, the Oriental man accepts that he is backward as the Occident man said so and he tries to catch up with the contemporary world. Yet, there has always been resistance to self-Orientalism. Those opposing the process were seen as obstructionists, while opponents saw the process as self-colonialism. Indeed, there are sometimes exaggerations in self-Orientalist movements as people were persecuted or even executed due to their resistance. We know from Türkiye that people refusing to wear hats were hanged to death. On the other hand, Self-Orientalism is a process initiated by elites of the Orient, who have links with the West and know it very well. These pioneers spread 'superior' Western values and norms in their countries, causing an intellectual revival, which culminates in a homogenous culture (single language/ethnicity/history/religion). The process ends up with the creation of a nation-state, which is supposed to be a fruit of modernization (Bezci and Çiftçi, 2012: 146-153).

The above description fits in well with Türkiye's modernization process. From the early 19th century onwards, Turkish intellectuals saw the difference between the Ottoman Empire and the West and began to Westernize the state and society, which they thought was backward due to the Ottoman Islamic culture. After the revival among Ottoman elites, the political system was switched to constitutional monarchy, and then a nation-state was founded after the collapse of the empire. In the aftermath, a massive re-branding process was launched to Westernize the newly founded Turkish republic. From clothing to Gregorian calendar, the Turkish state and society

were Occidentalized during the course of self-Orientalism. In addition, in Türkiye's case, there was an internal hierarchical Orientalism in self-Orientalism as Turkish seculars controlling the state put themselves into the center and positioned people, particularly ethnic and religious minorities as well as conservative Turks in the periphery (Mardin, 1973). Türkiye's founding elites also attempted to locate the country in the Occident since both the Ottoman Empire and Türkiye had territories on the European continent. As Türkiye has been negotiating for the EU membership, this claim is formal now. Finally, as will be explained below, Türkiye's foreign policy towards the Orient, literally the Middle East was exclusionary since they saw the Arab and Islamic culture as the reason for the Ottoman Empire's backwardness. Unlike other examples of self-Orientalism, Türkiye's experience was flavorless since the state forced its citizens to adapt to Western values while it estranged itself from the Middle East because of self-Orientalism and Orientalism.

The Turkish experience also revealed that there are two types of self-Orientalism: holistic self-Orientalism and technological-only self-Orientalism. Whether Türkiye should be a Western-like state with all its institutions, culture, economic system, laws, fashion, alphabet, etc. or only technological developments should be Orientalized have always been a matter of debate in Türkiye. The discussion continues even now. Secular Turks argue(d) that Europe owes its success not only to industry but also its culture, thus Türkiye should follow steps of Europeans. Islamic community, on the contrary, assert(ed) that the Muslim Turkish community was already superior culturally, thereby obtaining industrial know how would be enough. Their reference was always Japan, as the Japanese could become a developed country without changing their traditions, life styles, alphabet, and so forth. However, since those supporting the holistic self-Orientalism were in power, they made a top-down revolution, which was got inspired by the French revolution of 1789. Since the revolution was painful for the opponents of holistic self-Orientalism, Occidentalist sentiments spread among them. The debate still continues at a peak level in contemporary Türkiye, and it seems it will not end in near future. In addition, Türkiye's case has shown that fast changes are not easily digested, thus self-Orientalism should be gradual. In addition, will of people is crucial to move forward. If policymakers can not convince people, opposition to the re-branding increases. Particularly cultural reforms are not welcomed by people and seen as voluntary self-colonialism. In such cases, governments might want to maintain reforms by force, but the result is generally a state of instability disturbing all sides. Then, both

defenders and opponents of self-Orientalism unconsciously impede the development of the country as they clash with each other.

Türkiye-Middle East Relations and Self-Orientalism

When Türkiye was founded in 1923, the whole Middle East was under British and French rule. Therefore, Türkiye's interlocutors were British and French states (Türkmen, 2014: 2). According to Aktaş (2011: 165), imperial powers tried to provoke enmity between the Arab States and Türkiye while exploiting their natural resources simultaneously. This being the case, it was officially not possible to improve relations with regional countries. Even if there were such a possibility, Türkiye would continue to deal with its internal problems as ruling elites were engaging in making fundamental changes in the political, social, and cultural system to the country. Westernization meant becoming distant from the Arab World and Islam, which were reminders of the Ottoman Empire (Sleiman, 2002: 1). Thus, they tried to identify Türkiye with Western values rather than the Islamic World and the Middle East (Sayari, 1997: 51). Since religion was seen as one of big source of problems, Ataturk's solution for a civilized country was to separate state from religion, thus introducing *laicite*, the French version of secularity. To secularize the country, Ataturk abolished the Caliphate, who he claimed to be an 'Arab Institution', and abandoned the Ministry of Sharia and Foundations, remarking the end of Sharia rule (Al-Ghazzi and Kradidy, 2013: 2343). Republican elites also banned all activities of religious groups; closed religious schools; purified Turkish language from Arabic and Persian words; accepted the Latin alphabet; inserted the article stating that Türkiye is a secular country into the constitution, and so forth (Duran and Karaca, 2013: 122). While this re-branding aimed to Westernize Türkiye, another goal was to move away from the Middle East, which allegedly pulled the Turkish state back from the contemporary World. Also, as the Kemalist regime opposed multicultural and multiethnic populations, nationalism became one of the pillars of the republic. Any Muslim ethnic group other than Turks were forcibly assimilated while non-Muslim minorities were discriminated against (Taşpinar, 2008: 5). For the young republic, nationalism and secularism were two important determinants of its foreign policy.

On the other hand, despite maintaining the status quo, the Turkish government pursued some revisionist policies as well. For example, it tried to annex Mosul from Iraq but failed.

Regarding Iran, Türkiye occupied some lands of Iran in 1929 to prevent attacks of Kurdish dissidents. This problem was solved by exchanging occupied Iranian lands with some Turkish lands. In addition, Türkiye ceded Syrian land, Alexandretta (Hatay), from France right after Ataturk died. As for non-neighboring Middle Eastern countries, there were no noteworthy relations. Conversely, in the same period, the Turkish state tried to strengthen its relations with Western countries, which it assumed as centers of civilization and development, a classical acceptance of Orientalism. In the 1930s, the only country that Türkiye had good ties in the region was another self-Orientalizing country; Iran. Besides Iran, Afghan rulers also made regular visits to Türkiye to observe the secularization and modernization process (Ülgen, 2011: 4). It can be concluded that during the early years of the Turkish state, as the Turkish proverb 'the strong is always imitated' perfectly depicts, Türkiye pursued paths of the powerful West and copied all their reforms to catch them. While doing this, it turned its back to the weak Middle East except for pro-Western countries. Thus, there was solidarity among westernizers of the Middle East.

When the Second World War ended, Türkiye became a member of the Western bloc due to the Soviet threat and renounced impartiality in its foreign policy in favor of the West. This was great luck for a country of the Orient, as it became a member of the Occident. Yet, excessive and exaggerative Westernism led to accusations that Türkiye was the representative of the American-led Western bloc in the region, which negatively changed Türkiye's image in the Arab World (Şahin, 2010: 12). Indeed, Türkiye followed a staunch pro-Western policy in the 1950s, ironically, by the Adnan Menderes government, which had problems with the Kemalist regime (Göktepe and Seydi, 2015: 2007). Concerning the containment policy of the U.S. against the Soviet-led communist expansionism, the Turkish government acted in line with its Western allies. For example, Türkiye was the first country that recognized Israel. In addition, it voted in favor of France in the UN against Algeria's independence. In other words, Türkiye behaved like an Occidental country. Meanwhile, Türkiye joined the Baghdad Pact together with Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and the UK. However, Iraq quit in 1958 and Iran in 1979 due to regime changes. Not surprisingly, all members of the pact were either secular or pro-Western countries. In fact, some other Arab countries were also invited to join the pact but since they opted for the Soviet Union, they rejected the call (Grigoriadis, 2010: 4). Actually, Arabs had no other choice as it was the West that colonized them and supported Israel (Duman, 2005: 314). Overall, Türkiye's excessive

Western policies in the region further alienated it from Arab countries. However, Turkish policymakers embraced separation as they were enjoying self-Orientalism.

The 1960s and the 1970s saw an indispensable diversification in Turkish foreign policy. When the U.S. did not support Türkiye in the Cyprus case and threatened not to defend it against the Soviet Union, Türkiye desperately understood that it had to multiply its friends (Sinkaya, 2011: 84). Therefore, it froze self-Orientalism for a while and tried to restore its relations with the Middle East. For example, the Turkish government had a pro-Palestine posture during the Six-Day War in 1969. It also attended proceedings of the Organization of Islamic Conference in 1969 but did not become a member, putting forward its secular system as an excuse. Hence, Türkiye's obsession with secularism showed that it did not only separate the state from religion but also other states, a sign showing it will never give up self-Orientalism. Furthermore, the 1973 oil crisis was costly for Türkiye, causing budget and current account deficits. The remedy was rapprochement with the Middle East and foster export to the region, which boomed in the next decade. Besides dependence on oil and American reluctance in the Cyprus crisis, the saliency of Islam in Turkish politics also forced the government not to ignore the Middle East (Sayari, 1997: 45). However, ideologically, nothing changed in Türkiye's Westernizing stance in this period. What right-wing governments were opposing was not self-Orientalism but low-level relations with the Middle East. While secular governments were hostile to the regional countries, conservative ones pointed out the necessity of normalizing relations.

Engagement with the Middle East increased in both the 1980s and the 1990s. Economically, Türkiye's exports to regional countries increased as they were good markets for Turkish goods. This was boosted by the liberalization of the economy by Turgut Özal, who came to power in 1983. However, Türkiye encountered the first serious threats from the region in the 1980s. For instance, the Islamic regime of Iran caused fears of the spread of the Islamic system. In addition, besides disputes over the quantity of waters of Euphrates and Tigris rivers to flow to Syria and Iraq, the PKK began to attack Turkish forces from its strongholds based in Iraq and Syria. Özal tried to develop Türkiye's relations with both countries to prevent PKK's infiltration into Turkish territories but attacks continued. Meanwhile, while Türkiye was struggling with terrorism in its eastern borders as well as enhancing economic cooperation with the Middle East, it also applied for membership to the European Union in 1987 in respect of its Westernization

policy. It was an attempt to integrate more with the West and prove that Türkiye was not in the Orient but the Occident. The EU's answer was neither No nor Yes, but proof was that Europeans were seeing Türkiye as being in Europe. Otherwise, the application would be rejected due to geographical reasons.

In the 1990s, Türkiye had relations with both the EU and the Middle East. As for the Middle East, Türkiye supported the US-led coalition together with many Arab countries during the Gulf War in 1991. Two reasons for Türkiye's support are remarkable. First, Özal wanted to prove that Türkiye was still an indispensable Western ally, after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Second, Turks were worried about Saddam Hussain's dangerous policies in the region. By overthrowing Hussain, Türkiye would not only relieve but also annex Mosul and Kirkuk, over which Türkiye had historical claims. This was actually a dramatic change in Turkish foreign policy for the first time in decades; it left the non-involvement tenet and pursued an interventionist policy. Nonetheless, the Gulf War turned into a nightmare. When the UN imposed sanctions on Iraq after the war, Türkiye's economic loss exceeded \$20 billion. Moreover, Kurds living in Northern Iraq gained autonomy under U.S. protection. What is worse, Iraq's becoming a failed state made it a haven for the PKK. These years saw massive PKK attacks from Syria and Iraq against Turkish troops, culminating in the murder of thousands of soldiers and civilians. Eventually, Türkiye threatened the Syrian regime with the war in 1998 unless Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK leader, left Syria. Öcalan had to leave the country and was caught in Kenya in 1999. In general, the threats coming from the Iranian regime and neighboring Arab countries made many Turks, in particular those who were secular-minded, think how separating from the Middle East was a correct decision. However, the illogic was that Iraq and Syria were secular, nationalist countries as was Türkiye.

While Türkiye was struggling with terrorism as well as the ideological expansion of Iran, Islamic Refah (Welfare) Party headed by Necmettin Erbakan came to power with a coalition government in 1996. Türkiye's secular groups including the army alarmed with the Refah government as they saw it as a threat to the regime. What outraged seculars were the government's attempts to lift the ban on wearing headscarves in public buildings and some other domestic policies that reminded them of Sharia rule. In terms of foreign relations, secular opposition feared that the Erbakan government would undermine Türkiye's relations with Israel

and distance the country from the West. Erbakan was an Occidentalist politician, who believed in the superiority of the Muslim world (not the whole Orient) over the West. However, Erbakan did not touch military agreements signed with Israel. It was obvious that secular groups, particularly media and army, were exaggerating the government's policies. Yet, when Erbakan's first international visit was paid to Muslim countries, the U.S. and other Western countries outraged and sided with the secular opposition against the Erbakan government. In the end, Erbakan could not stand against pressures and resigned in 1997. Thus, the first-ever Occidentalist Prime Minister had to resign due to military pressure. His party, the Rafah Party, was closed by the Constitutional Court, alleging that the party had become the center of anti-secularism. Thus, the Islamic party in power was closed due to being against anti-Western values, literally for halting self-Orientalism. When the Bülent Ecevit government came to power in 1999, in the Helsinki Summit, it was announced that Türkiye was a candidate for EU membership. It was a great occasion for Türkiye since Türkiye's acceptance as an Occidental/Western country became official. This meant that it would not incur Orientalist discrimination. Besides, Türkiye was again on rails to the West. On the other hand, Foreign Minister İsmail Cem launched a policy of improving relations with all neighbors including Middle Eastern countries. In respect of his policy, he ended enmity with Syria and enhanced ties with Greece. Believing that Türkiye should embrace its Ottoman past, Cem adopted a multidirectional foreign policy that aimed to live in peace with countries in the region by using historical, cultural, and economic ties (Sinkaya, 2011: 90).

When the Ecevit-led coalition lost power to Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the founder, and leader of the Justice and Development Party-*Ak Party*, all eyes were on Erdogan due to his Islamic ideology. While Erdogan did not deny his Islamic views, he maintained the Westernization policy. Yet, his era also saw the most powerful ties with Middle Eastern countries ever. As soon as Ak Party came to power, Prime Minister Abdullah Gül rejected U.S. requests to use Turkish territories to invade Iraq. Therefore, relations with the U.S. deteriorated at the beginning of the Ak Party era. However, Türkiye supported the U.S. project called the Greater Middle East Project that aimed to democratize regional countries. Yet, the U.S. revoked it when Islamist groups won elections. In addition, Türkiye tried to have good relations with Israel and mediated between the Israeli state and Syria. Besides being a strong country in the region, Israel was also key to open doors in Washington due to the Jewish lobby. Nonetheless, the Israeli-

Lebanese war in 2006, the Gaza war in 2008, Erdogan's debate with Israeli President Peres in Davos (one-minute case), and the Israeli attack on the Mavi Marmara ship that killed ten Turkish citizens turned Turko-Israeli friendship into enmity. As of 2020, Turkish-Israeli relations were still at a very low level.

On the other hand, the Turkish government began to introduce new policies to solve its problems with neighbors. 'Zero problems with neighbors,' coined by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who worked as an advisor, foreign minister and prime minister in AK Party governments, is one of them (Akçakoca, 2009: 1). With this, a bit more theoretical rather than realistic policy, relations with Middle Eastern countries still developed for a while. As an example of the degree of friendship, Turkish and Syrian people visited each other without passports. In addition, Türkiye's exports to the Middle East increased so much that some countries' imports from Türkiye grew ten times within ten years. In 2010, Türkiye's export to Middle Eastern countries represented more than 20% of total exports (Barkey, 2011: 5). Perhaps, the best economic project was the EU-like free trade agreement called 'The Close Neighbors Economic and Trade Association Council (CNETAC)', which was signed by Türkiye, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. The objective was to enable free movement of goods, people, and capital. It was called the "Middle Eastern Schengen Area," whose name was inspired by European Schengen and based on Sham, the Turkish name for Damascus (Albarracin, 2011: 238). However, this embryo of the common market did not last long due to the Arab Spring. The era beginning from the first AK Party government to the Arab Spring saw attempts to revive relations with old friends. Stereotypes like 'Dirty Arabs' were replaced with ones like 'Brothers.' The Orient was no longer seen as backward and hostile but friendly.

On the other hand, before the Arab Spring, Türkiye had an active, constructive, and appreciated foreign policy in the region (Khalifa, 2017: 106). As an aside, it had established close relations with undemocratic regimes, marking that it invested in the status quo (Altunışık, 2011: 3). However, when popular protests erupted, Turkish policymakers were caught unprepared about which side to choose to support. Eventually, they sided with pro-democracy groups as opposed to authoritarian regimes. Therefore, all friendships they established until the Arab Spring suddenly turned into hostility. Qaddafi, Mubarak, and Assad, who were once good friends of Erdogan, began to see him as an adversary. Moreover, since the Muslim Brotherhood was also among

opposition groups, Türkiye was accused of supporting political Islamists. This claim was not wrong but just a detail as the Turkish government was on the side of people regardless of their worldviews. Consequently, Türkiye's relations with other Arab regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE as well as Iran deteriorated due to being on opposite sides. Besides political reasons, this study asserts that one basic reason is self-Orientalism. Self-Orientalism for the Middle East was to get rid of the old-fashioned authoritarian regimes. When people revolted to self-Orientalize themselves, authoritarian regimes combined their powers to make revolutions fail. Türkiye, conversely, tried to help people to realize their goals but while doing this, it also tried to revive old ties due to economic, cultural, religious and political reasons that would help Turks to have more influence or even leadership in the region.

However, Turkish government's attempts failed, causing only hostility with authoritarian regimes and their regional supporters. Thus, the foreign policy pursued during the Arab Spring failed due to failure of uprisings as well as Türkiye's weak capacity to change the course to its favor.

As a final sub-issue, one of the issues in the last twenty years of Turkish foreign and domestic policy has been to determine the route of self-Orientalism. The main decisive actor is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been in power since 2002. The Erdoğan-led conservative Ak Party governments and their Islamic electorate divide self-Orientalism into two; moral and technological Orientalism. Ottoman elites clashed whether Orientalism should be limited to technological developments, or should it be totalitarian, including culture. When the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic opted for an entire self-Orientalism, the losing side resisted the decision. Even today, the type of Orientalism is still a matter of polarization in Turkish society. While Islamic governments and the majority of society refuse cultural self-Orientalism since they believe Turkish people and generally the East is morally superior to the West, referring to colonial past, family relations and irreligious society of the West, they admit that they are far behind the developed Western countries in terms of technological development. On the other hand, pro-Western seculars argue that technologic and cultural development are intertwined, thus whatever the West has must be accepted as it is. As of the 2020, conservative Turkish elites believe that it is possible to pass the Occident, which they deem as not culturally inspiring, through technological self-Orientalism. The construction of the West in their minds is the same

as the one in Western minds. That is, the West is indecent, immoral, selfish, addicted to sex and drug, colonizer, racist, and xenophobic. If this is the fact, then, Türkiye's current rulers argue, there is no need to stay away from the Middle East. However, clashes for power in the region, as seen during the Arab Spring, has made Türkiye's policymakers get confused about how to move forward with Arab neighbors since they have to choose between dictatorial regimes and people. Currently, after the failure of the Arab Spring, Türkiye has approached authoritarian regimes with both sides acting as if the uprisings never happened. It seems that historical Turkish and Arab opposing views still prevail in their foreign policy—but are more low key.

Conclusion

Self-Orientalism plays a considerable role in Türkiye's foreign policy towards the Middle East and the rest of the World. As Türkiye's founders were self-Orientalists, their foreign policy towards the Middle East was exclusionary due to self-Orientalist views. To preserve the secular structure of the state, they alienated themselves from the region, which was deemed as Islamic, non-secular, oriental, and backward. Their relations with the region were pragmatic, interest-based (mainly economic), and security-oriented. On the other hand, since Türkiye is a candidate for EU membership, which encourages Turks to argue that their country is geographically in the West, they think they are exempt from being the object of the Orientalist discursive construction.

In addition, Turkish society is divided between those defending only technological self-Orientalism and those supporting the continuation of the holistic self-Orientalism. The former's views about the West is the same as Orientalists' views about the East. Conversely, the holistic self-Orientalists want to accept Western values as they are in consonance with being a developed country. The inner clash affects the foreign policy as well. While the holistic side cut relations with the Middle East from the early days of the Republic as per self-Orientalism, the conservative side thinks there is no obstacle for developing good relations with the region. However, the latest developments show that the historical status quo will continue. Thus, the prejudices against the Middle East will probably continue though not as much as in the past.

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