Making Sense of 1 March:
A Proactive Strategy of Avoidance

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Abstract

This study examines the Turkish decision not to ally with the United States on 1 March 2003. It argues that Turkey, motivated by the struggle for autonomy, developed a proactive strategy of avoidance against the US's demands mainly because of its concerns on the possible consequences of the instability that was expected as an outcome of a US war in Iraq. This was neither a balancing nor a bandwagoning behaviour. Through the use of diplomatic channels on different levels, Turkey attempted to decrease the harmful effects of the approaching instability. Five diplomatic tracks show that the Turkish behaviour was a proactive avoidance strategy.

Key Words

Unipolar structure, international alignment, US-Turkish relations.

Introduction

Ten years have passed since 1 March 2003, and the Turkish decision not to allow American troops to invade Iraq from the north is still puzzling. Despite

the US's optimistic expectations and heavy pressure put on Ankara, Turkey rejected allying with the United States in its war against the Saddam government. It was unexpected because of Turkey's well-known foreign policy of being a loyal ally for years and because US leaders were putting in every effort to convince the newly established Turkish government. But unexpectedly there were not enough votes in the parliament to grant the right of passage for US troops.

Since then, some explanations have been provided to try to make sense of the Turkish decision on 1 March 2003. However, these explanations generally focus on the consequences of the Turkish refusal rather than examining its causes and meaning. This article tries to answer two questions. First, what was the main cause of the Turkish refusal? Second, how can we make sense of the Turkish decision not to ally with the United States? In response, this article argues from a structural perspective

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that Turkey refused to ally with the United States because it considered the US's initiation of a war against Iraq as a source of instability that would upset the Turkish struggle for autonomy under the unipolar structure. Therefore, the Turkish rejection can best be described as a proactive, soft, and aggressive avoidance. Turkey employed neither a strategy of balancing necessarily directed against the United States nor a strategy of bandwagoning at the expense of its own autonomy. The five diplomatic tracks (with Iraq, international organizations, UN Security Council members, regional states, and the United States) that was carried out illustrates the Turkish concerns about possible instability and its strategy of soft and aggressive avoidance.

> Turkey employed neither a strategy of balancing necessarily directed against the United States nor a strategy of bandwagoning at the expense of its own autonomy.

Following this introduction, the next section summarizes the commonly used explanations for the Turkish decision on 1 March by classifying them into three different groups. It pays special and critical attention to evaluating the arguments based on the "soft balancing" literature. The third section summarizes the theoretical claim that the secondary states under the unipolar structure ally against the source of instability because of their struggle for autonomy, and then explains the causes of the soft and aggressive strategies of avoidance by distinguishing them through the concept of soft balancing. The fourth section evaluates the case at hand in detail. It is composed of three subsections. Firstly it shows that the main concern of the Turkish leadership was based on the possible outcomes of an unexpected transformation in Iraq and the region. Secondly it describes the Turkish decision not to ally with the United States as a proactive and soft strategy of avoidance by providing the first four tracks of diplomacy. Thirdly it explores the negotiation process between the United States and Turkey to show that the same strategy of avoidance for the sake of autonomy was used. The fifth section provides concluding remarks with some suggestions for further research on the case.

Possible Explanations for the Non- Alignment Decision

After ten years just a few scholarly works have been published on the meaning and causes of the Turkish refusal on 1 March 2003, although it

proved to be one of the most distinctive and puzzling foreign policy actions of the newly established Turkish government under the Justice and Development Party. The debates around the topic have remained limited to the policy circles that tend to focus mainly on ideological positions and policy outcomes. Policy-oriented analysts mostly keep repeating some arguments derived not from the causes of that foreign policy behaviour but from its outcomes. According to this kind of logic, they claim, for instance, that the Turkish refusal was a catastrophic decision since it allowed for the increased power of the PKK. Some others claim that it was a successful foreign policy action because it created an environment which helped build the new Turkish foreign policy identity. After 1 March, Turkey's image in the region became more favourable in the eyes of Arab governments and in the streets. While some claim that this event introduced an unrepairable reliability problem in Turkish-American relations, still others claim that this was good foreign policy act as it established a genuine understanding between the United States and Turkey that they had an equal and sustainable relationship even though there was a temporary crisis.[1] The general tendency in assaying such a transformative event has unfortunately been not causal, but descriptive and ideological.

> Whatever the ideological background of the government party and the political identities of its supporters were, JDP leaders have followed a rational foreign policy agenda.

All these kinds of arguments do not examine causal explanations, but instead are derived from subjective expectations. Focusing on policy outcomes rather than the causes and meaning of the Turkish behaviour overlooks the emerging regularity and tendency in Turkish foreign policy. However, just a few academic studies have tried to discover the causes of that specific foreign policy behaviour.

Considering the examples published, one can classify these works into three different groups. First, there are some studies mainly arguing that the Turkish decision on 1 March was rooted in domestic politics.[2] Second, some studies describe the process on the interaction level and make the claim that some bilateral misunderstandings were the main causes of the Turkish behaviour.[3] Third, a few analysts use a structural framework by presenting the classic balance of power theory in a new form called "soft balancing."[4]

First, on the domestic level, three arguments come forth: the Islamist

background of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), its lack of experience in foreign affairs, and the high level of opposition in Turkish society against the US. It is commonly argued that since the JDP and its representatives come from an Islamist background, their leaders could not convince the party group to vote in favour of the 1 March motion as the party representatives viewed the passage of the motion as an indication of a war mongering attitude against a Muslim-populated country. Actually such an argument was quite common during the early stages of the JDP government. Many analysts viewed the party as mainly having an Islamist agenda both in domestic and foreign affairs. Accordingly it would not support a close alignment with the United States against Iraq.

Ten years later, this claim is no longer common in policy circles and also in scholarly works. It appears that whatever the ideological background of the government party and the political identities of its supporters were, JDP leaders have followed a rational foreign policy agenda. Although the JDP pays more attention to Middle Eastern affairs than previous governments, these days it is difficult to find references to the Islamist agenda of the JDP. Beyond that this argument is not supported empirically for two reasons. First, after

Iraq the JDP attempted to re-establish a strategic partnership with America. Especially during the times of crises in the region Turkey has repeatedly allied with the United States. The "Arab Spring" and its influence on Turkish foreign policy in the region seem like a good indicator of this. Again, for the last two years Turkey has been coming closer to the NATO alliance in its attitude towards Iran. Considering this and similar examples indicate that JDP leaders and followers do not hold any blindly ideological foreign policy perspective. This is not to say that the JDP does not have its own foreign policy agenda rooted in its identity and its distinctive character. Surely the ideological position of the party might have some effects on its decisions, especially on the tactical level,[5] but this is totally different from making the claim that the JDP's strategy in Iraq was decided by its identity.

Additionally, an in-depth analysis of the negotiations between the US and Turkey can also illustrate how the 1 March decision was not an outcome of government identity. If we trace the roots of the negotiations back into the Ecevit government, we can observe that despite its ideological difference with the JDP, Ecevit would probably have acted the same as the JDP. According to Fikret Bila, a famous Turkish journalist who was a close observer, American officials

had discussed the same topic with the Ecevit government and the officials were convinced that Washington would fail to get Turkish support from the Ecevit government.[6] Bila says that leftist Prime Minister Ecevit advised JDP Prime Minister Abdullah Gül not to go to a war in Iraq when he was handing over his position.[7] If both governments were on the same page then the claim that the rejection of the motion on 1 March was an ideological reaction falls short as an explanation of the event.

> The Americans were using all pressure available in order to convince the reluctant Turkish side, while Turkey was trying to find a way of avoiding it.

Not only were the Turkish governments that were carrying out the negotiations with the United States uncomfortable with the US's demands, but also all other influential institutions on Turkish foreign policy seemed to share the same sort of concerns. The Chief of General Staff Hilmi Özkök repeatedly commented on the harmony between the positions of the Turkish Armed Forces and the Gül government.[8] Also President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Speaker of Parliament Bülent Arınç declared their opposition more than

anyone else. The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (RPP), was also an ardent opponent of even negotiating with the US government. In fact, during the negotiations, the Gül government was viewed as the sole supporter of the motion. On 26 February, two days after the motion was sent to the parliament by the Council of Ministers, the news that was leaked to the media was about the uneasiness of the military on the motion.[9] This was quite a shock to the members of the JDP. If the motion had passed the JDP would be the only responsible actor in the domestic politics. Erickson explains the similarities between the government and military as follows:

> The vote was a bellwether signal to America. But, more importantly, it signaled an important shift in Turkish military politics as well. Prior to votes of this sort in Parliament (examples include participation on UN or NATO peacekeeping missions and support for Coalition or NATO combat missions), the TGS often provides a recommendation to the Turkish Parliament. In this case, the Turkish General Staff sent a "decision not to recommend" (a neutral stance, but one that clearly did not support the US).... In effect, the Turkish military stood against the Americans and left the decision solely to the politicians.[10]

In summary, the JDP government and all other institutions involved in foreign affairs were against an agreement with the United States under the terms offered. It

seems that the Islamist background of the JDP had little to do with the rejection of the motion. It can, however, be considered a complementary motive to some extent. Furthermore, some might still speculatively argue that the JDP used its Islamist image as an excuse to go against the American wishes because it was easier for an Islamist political movement to use that as an excuse if even the secular institutions were also not comfortable with that.

Another domestic-level argument is related to the public opinion for the war in Iraq. Although it is difficult to find a complete account of this argument in any scholarly work, it is used as a commonsensical factor that affected Ankara's behaviour. However, despite seemingly being common knowledge, the data on Turkish public opinion does not support that argument. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, in 2003 just 22% of Turkish society supported the US-led war against terrorism.[11] In 2004, it increased up to 37%, and decreased to 17% in 2005 and to 14% in 2006. Although it shows a low level of support for each year, it seems that the Turkish public opinion on the US-led war on terrorism was not fixed and was likely to change depending upon the attitude of the government. It thus cannot be considered as a sufficient cause for the refusal. Furthermore, the Iraq War

affected public opinion less than argued. The support for the US-led war was 30% in 2002 when Iraq War was not still on the agenda, and fell to 22% during the war. Therefore, the war decreased public support by just 8%. It seems that the low level of public support served to soften the lack of Turkish support for the US, rather than being a primary cause of Turkish rejection.

> Even though there is no multipolar or bipolar world, that does not mean that states have given up balancing against a possible hegemon.

The second group that the various arguments published examines the interaction level, and some argue that the Turkish rejection was related to the failure of both Turkey and the United States to understand each other's needs. Such an explanation emphasizes the US arrogance during the negotiations and Turkey's counterproductive strategies.[12] However, such an explanation is naïvely unable to grasp the main tenets of the negotiation process. With 50 years of partnership, as will be explained in the coming sections, both sides were clearly aware of what was going on and what was at stake. The Americans were using

all pressure available in order to convince the reluctant Turkish side, while Turkey was trying to find a way of avoiding it. The Americans leaked news illustrating Turkey as "bargaining for horses" in order to accelerate the process of negotiations. On the other side, Turkish diplomats were bargaining over the smallest detail in order to delay the process. It seems that Turkey was following a postponement strategy that was either aiming at preventing of war or gaining more concessions from the United States. In any case, the negotiation process was not a simple failure of understandings. It was based on consciously planned strategies.

Other analysts use structural analysis and argue that Turkey used some sort of soft balancing strategies since it was unable to balance the United States in a classical balance of power understanding because of the unipolar structure. According to this logic, the United States, as the sole superpower in the system, was so powerful that any balancing behaviour would have unbearable costs for the balancers. Therefore, secondary states in the system discover subtle ways of balancing it. They do not use classical internal and external balancing strategies but employ smart strategies that would stop superpower aggression.

This newly emerging field is in fact part of the balance of power research programme and it has been gaining popularity for the last decade as a tool of explaining the unipolar anomaly in the balance of power theories. According to the balance of power theory, after the end of the Cold War the unipolar moment should not have lasted long and the world should have shifted to multipolarity. New great powers should have emerged and balanced against US power, since after disruption new balances of power have always formed and reformed.[13] For Waltz, unipolarity is the least stable form of polarity since units wishing to survive in an anarchic environment would ally against the most powerful.[14] However, despite expectations, after more than 20 years unipolarity continues to resist what the balance of power theories argue would happen.

As a refinement of the classical theory, supporters of the neo-realist alliance research programme have devised the argument of soft balancing.[15] Even though there is no multipolar or bipolar world, that does not mean that states have given up balancing against a possible hegemon. In contrast they believe that secondary states in the system keep balancing against the United States in a soft way. With several examples, like 2003 Iraq War, they claim that the balance of power theory still explains the international system.

Since the first publication of the soft balancing argument, a large amount of literature has emerged around the concept of soft balancing, discussing both its pros and cons. Here is not the place to go into details of that discussion. But we can provide some of the central criticisms provided on the theoretical level.[16] According to the critics, this new concept of balancing is so broad that as a concept it has become an empty signifier, theoretically useless, and empirically unfalsifiable. Such a refinement to the theory puts the alliance formation research programme into a degenerative process as "auxiliary belts" are used in order to save the classical balance of power understanding.[17] Therefore, the concept of balancing has been broadened to the extent where it has no explanatory power, all for the sake of saving the classical balancing theory.

In order to name a state behaviour as a balancing act one has to clarify at least two elements: the means and the ends. According to the supporters of the soft balancing argument, secondary states are employing soft means. But they are also claiming that these means target American power or interests. Although it is clear that the secondary states in the system are employing soft means, it is not clear that they are targeting American power. It seems that proponents of soft balancing are making the false inference that if any state is increasing its power or cooperating with some other state then that means it is balancing against the United States. According to the logic of the soft balancing concept, for example, any investment in Turkey that has nothing to do with the superpower can also be interpreted as an act directed against it. Alternatively any cooperation on climate change between Turkey and Russia could also be interpreted as an alliance against the United States.

Here a distinction between cooperation and alliances should be made clear. Alliances differ from cooperation because alliances depend on the blanket character of enemy;[18] in other words they are formed against something not for something. As Liska puts it in his classical study on alliances, "Alliances are against, and only derivatively for, someone or something."[19] Therefore, if any foreign policy behaviour is named as balancing, it should be made clear that it is formed against something. Cooperation on the other hand is positive in nature and is formed to increase something, not to limit it. Broadening the concept of balancing to that level carries the risk of naming all cooperation as alliances, subjects which are totally different from each other and represent the oppositional camps of realist and liberal paradigms.

Therefore, any application of the concept of soft balancing to the case of Turkish-American relations in 2003 falls short of making sense of the process since for the entire process the Turkish attitude towards the United States can be called soft, but cannot be called directed against it. Turkish concerns were not directly related to the United States' power position in the system. It held more limited concerns related to the region. Surely, Turkey would like to have the capability of balancing against US power, but under these conditions, and aware of the costs of any balancing act, it chose to act softly and followed soft policies but those cannot be referred to as balancing.

Alliances under Unipolar Structures

From a structural perspective this study claims that the Turkish non-alignment decision on 1 March was an outcome of Turkish concerns about the possible consequences of a destabilizing war in the region on Turkish autonomy. The argument that will be developed is based on a structural realist framework that argues that the core dynamics of international politics is that the struggle for autonomy and under a unipolar structure states hold *status quo* concerns and act offensively.[20] As an outcome of

that logic, in their alignment decisions states are expected to choose to ally with others against any source of instability. Under unipolarity, instability might rise from two kinds of sources: from the unipole or from any other secondary state. In both cases secondary states in the system ally not against power[21] or against some threat[22] or for some loosely defined national interest,[23] but they ally against the source of instability. If instability arises from any other secondary state, then they are expected to join large coalitions around the superpower. Alternatively, if instability arises from the attitudes of the superpower then others in the system are expected to follow soft policies which mean neither bandwagoning[24] nor balancing. They do not jump into the bandwagon of the superpower because of their struggle for autonomy. Again they do not balance (by directing their attention to the limitation of the superpower's capabilities or interests) against it because simply they cannot. Instead they follow soft and aggressive policies not specifically directed against the superpower in contrast to the expectations of soft balancing argument.

> The only structural way to derive state motivation is to focus on the implications of the anarchic structure.

According to the theoretical framework used in this study, the core dynamic of international politics is a struggle for autonomy. In contrast to the assumptions of realist theories of international relations, states do not wish to survive, maximize security,[25] maximize power,[26] or absolute well-being.[27] They just want to remain autonomous, which means developing a capability to act in accordance with their own position in the system rather than delegating some part of their autonomy to a higher authority. This might be an elusive and unrealizable goal, but a sense of winning against their destiny in which they are located in forces states to achieve at least some part of that loosely defined aim. The capabilities of a state might vary depending upon whether it is a superpower or a small state. Therefore some might want expansion while some others want just security. Depending on their position in the distribution of capabilities a state's motivation might range from world hegemony to a wish to survive. Theoretically, we cannot know or assume what all states want. The only structural way to derive state motivation is to focus on the implications of the anarchic structure. If it is defined as usual as "the lack of central authority,"[28] then the only derivation that one can do about state motivation is that states struggle for autonomy. As a concept autonomy is broader than that of survival. Since survival means that there is always a threat present at all stages of international politics it is a specific name for some specific conditions. However, anarchic environments are not only threatening but also present opportunities. For this reasoning if we need to derive any state motivation from anarchy that is the struggle for autonomy. States wish to sustain it by adjusting themselves to the distribution of capabilities in the system.

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Units struggling for autonomy under the unipolar structure wish to sustain the *status quo* because they lack the capabilities to deal with all kinds of transformation and hence in reaction to instabilities they act aggressively. But the strategies of aggressive behaviour depend on the source of instability. If it is a secondary state in the system all the others gather around a coalition led by the superpower, and if it is the superpower then they try to develop soft and aggressive strategies of avoidance not necessarily directed against the superpower.

Turkish Non-Alignment as a Struggle for Autonomy

In Turkish foreign policy autonomy has always been a main concern. It might present itself differently under different conditions of power arrangements. For example, in less favourable structures Turkish leaders might only be concerned with survival, while in more favourable situations they might dream of expansion as part of their struggle for autonomy.

Since the early periods of the JDP government the concept of autonomy has played a central role in Turkish foreign policy. Referring to the writings of current Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, who has been considered the main figure behind the JDP's foreign policy since it came power, one can easily see the central role of the struggle for autonomy. His famous book *Strategic Depth*, which is viewed as the main building block of JDP's foreign policy, can be roughly summarized in two concepts: flexibility and autonomy.[29] Davutoğlu defines Turkey as one of the key players in its region and it has a potential to become a key player on the global level thanks to its geopolitical position. However, Davutoğlu also believes that in order to actualize that potential, Turkish foreign policymakers should follow a flexible

policy that does not fasten its agenda and aims to other power centres. This policy would make Turkey an active player setting the rules of the game rather than a passive object controlled by others.[30] Against the commonly used description of Turkey as a bridge between the East and West, he states that bridges are passive connections between two active entities. Turkey cannot be satisfied with such a role. Through the use of a flexible approach it should avoid any fixed position or alignment.

> The final denial of the motion on 1 March indicates that Turkey neither allied against the United States to limit US power, nor jumped on its bandwagon by delegating part of its autonomy, but instead Turkey remained outside by developing soft strategies of avoidance.

During the negotiations between the US and Turkey, Davutoğlu as the chief advisor to the Prime Minister, and other foreign policy elites would repeatedly emphasize Turkish autonomy by claiming that there was a need to recognize both sides as equal partners. The US authorities were expected to respect the Turkish struggle for autonomy. Indeed

the final denial of the motion on 1 March indicates that Turkey neither allied against the United States to limit US power, nor jumped on its bandwagon by delegating part of its autonomy, but instead Turkey remained outside by developing soft strategies of avoidance. Any war in Iraq would certainly cause an autonomy problem for Turkey. The US, as the only superpower in the system, was initiating a war which aimed at transforming Iraq. As a prototype for most other Middle Eastern countries Iraq was representing the first step of a regional transformation. Therefore, Turkey, like all other regional countries, felt that this US-led transformation would limit its autonomy in the region.

Explaining Turkish Concerns on Instability

In its struggle for autonomy under the unipolar structure before and during the Iraq War, Turkish policy makers were mainly concerned with the possible outcomes of an undesirable transformative US action in its region. Under these conditions, secondary states like Turkey are expected to consent to the *status quo* because of their awareness of the difficulty of managing a transformation in the system. Therefore, any aggressive behaviour initiated by the superpower would certainly create risks for stability and so for Turkish autonomy.

Prime Minister Abdullah Gül expressed the perspective of Turkey when he wrote that "Iraq is our close neighbor, and its future is inter-linked with the stability of the region."[31] As one of the key actors in the region, Turkey seemed to be in favour of, even if not satisfied enough with, the situation in both Iraq and the Middle East for three main reasons.

Firstly, the distribution of power in the region was to a great extent in favour of Turkey before the war and any unexpected event would risk the Turkish position in the regional distribution of capabilities. Specifically in military terms Turkey seemed to be the most powerful state in the region. According to Erickson, "with the exception of the US, the UK, and France, the Turks have the most institutional combat experience in the world today."[32] Despite the economic instabilities of the late 1990s, with its economic and demographic potential Turkey has the appropriate means of increasing its regional power position. In fact recent figures illustrate the realization of that expectation. Turkey's powerful position in its region has put it into a position far from immediate threats. By 2003, none of its neighbours had enough power to threaten Turkey's existential interests. Therefore, from the Turkish perspective there was no need for a change and Turkey could not be expected to support any war.

Secondly, Ankara did not perceive any threat particularly from Iraq that would require a transformation. At the end of the first Gulf War, Iraq had been put into a harmless position, not only far from projecting power against Turkey, but also from projecting power even in its own territories. In fact, the no-fly zone, as a buffer between Iraq and Turkey, had not only decreased possible Iraqi threats, but had also increased Turkey's manoeuvring space in its hinterland. Even if Turkey was not pleased with the antidemocratic regime in Iraq, it was at least a safe and contained neighbour. In the words of one official, "Turkey does not want democratization to bring instability to its neighborhood… why risk destabilization there."[33]

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Thirdly, by 2003 Turkey had been recently relieved from its most significant security problem. The leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured in 1999. The following years were successful in the fight against terrorism and there was a low number of casualties. Turkish military forces were able to control northern Iraq thanks to the vacuum of authority. Therefore, any change that would bring a new order in Iraq under the US leadership would mean a deprivation of Turkish control. Park clearly points out the Turkish concerns:

> Ankara's fear was that a war with Iraq could- whether by design, default or through opportunistic exploitation of chaos and uncertainty- raise the risk of an enlarged, oil rich, and more autonomous (if not fully independent) Kurdish self-governing entity emerging in northern Iraqi territory. Ankara also entertained fears of a renewal of PKK activity in the chaos of war, a replay of the refugee crisis of 1991, and has asserted its guardianship towards the Turkmen ethnic minority in Northern Iraq.[34]

But as Turkish leaders were enjoying relatively stability and a favourable position with regards to Iraq and the Middle East, they were faced with the US's demand for change. Additionally, the United States, as the traditional partner of Turkey, was expecting active Turkish support in a war that Turkey had never wished for and that could transform the order not only in Iraq but also in the Middle East. While considering possible harmful consequences of a war in Iraq under these conditions, Turkey faced a dilemma of allying with the US in order to transform the region or rejecting the only superpower. Despite

its close relations with the US for a nearly 60 years, Turkey decided to follow the latter policy. As Turkey was without the necessary tools to control possible instability in its region, it was not sure what sort of outcomes this US transformative action would cause.

For this reason, Turkey's warnings before the war focused on the territorial integrity of Iraq and about a possible struggle among the regional states to seize control over the torn territories of Iraq. In other words, in both cases unilateral changes in the region that would risk the Turkish position. If it went along with the US, Turkey would be moving towards a passive position dependent upon US intentions and goodwill since junior partners of an alliance are almost always less appreciated. Aligning with the US in starting a war of change, Turkey would be dragged into chaotic instability. Since secondary states like Turkey have only a small influence on the foreign policies of superpowers, they do not want such a transformation without the existence of alternative partners to ally with or without enough internal power to balance against the superpowers' policies.

The existing situation in the system could be transformed into a less desirable form. Secondary states favour the existing situation to any possible transformation since they can have only limited influence on the direction of change. In short, they prefer the better than the worst option. This is the reason why the Turkish government and the other institutions of the Turkish state emphasized the importance of stability in the region. These fears did not only belong to Turkey. During the process, other concerned secondary states, for example Germany, Russia, and France, repeatedly declared their opposition to the US policies. In a comparison between Russian and Turkish attitudes Hill and Taşpınar argue that:

> They [Russia and Turkey] want the United States to appreciate that the broader Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia are full of weak states prone to ethnic and sectarian fragmentation in case of sudden regime change. Turkey worries that political upheavals will become the basis for more, not less, regional conflicts; while Russia sees an anti-Russian alliance emerging around the Black Sea, if not across Eurasia.[35]

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Surely, none of the secondary states like Germany, France and Russia

supported Saddam and his regime in Iraq. They "place a high premium on stability in their neighborhood. They share an aversion towards potentially chaotic regime change."[36] They were far from being decisive players in the transformative event taking place in the Middle East. They observed the American transformative action as strengthening the already existing American sphere of influence. Because of the unipolar distribution of capabilities in the system they were unable to project power in the region and to interfere in any unstable situation. They were not supporting the Baath regime. All the actors argued that the US should "associate Iraq not with the war against terrorism, but with destabilizing chaos that has damaged their national interests- Turkey's more profoundly."[37]

Soft and Aggressive Strategies of Avoidance

While Turkey was motivated to preserve the *status quo*, its behaviour can best be described as a composition of soft and aggressive strategies of avoidance, rather than any sort of balancing or bandwagoning. It allied neither with nor against the United States. Instead, by avoiding an alliance, Ankara protected its autonomy. By using diplomatic channels it proactively opened new spaces

for operation rather than remaining passively apart from the issue. In contrast to defensively balancing and passively bandwagoning the general attitude was one of aggressive avoidance.

For reaching a peaceful, multilateral or evolutionary solution without being dragged into regional instability, Turkey pursued a multi-dimensional policy based on five different tracks and tried to operate these different tracks in accordance with preventing an untimely and unmanageable change. These tracks were: negotiating with the Iraqi government, having joint efforts at the UN and NATO level, forming contacts with the other UN Security Council members, meeting with the regional countries, and finally negotiating with the US. The five-track diplomatic policy presents the best evidence of how much Turkey considered stability important. In order to stop a war which would bring to in the region Turkey followed an exhausting pro-active shuttle diplomacy on these five different tracks.

However, none of these five tracks can be considered as a kind of balancing behaviour. Instead they were all diplomatic efforts in bilateral or multilateral cooperative forums. The main concern was not limiting American power or interests but finding a way of preserving stability by acting aggressively

in niche areas. Ankara did not form an alliance against any state but tried to cooperate with others on any level available.

> The Turkish attitude was a well-planned example of transcending the issue of a unilateral destabilizing war to a multilateral institution.

Firstly, Turkey tried to establish contacts with the Iraqi government. Turkish leaders struggled to convince an Iraqi government that seemed unable to grasp the seriousness of the threat because of its dictatorial government. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey engaged in this attempt in order to try to prevent the coming war by finding some concessions the Iraqi government could make that would increase the confidence of the Iraqi government before the international community.[38] Turkey insistently proposed to the Iraqi government to involve Kurdish and Shi'ite groups in the governing system and to increase cooperation with the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). Turkey also demanded very clear and open declarations from Iraq before international institutions.[39]

For this reason, and despite the risk of increasing American doubts, until the last stage Turkey did not give up on these efforts.

On 12 January, Kürşat Tüzmen, the state minister responsible for foreign trade, met with Saddam directly. Through a reciprocal exchange of letters, Turkey again and again notified the Iraqi government about its concerns. Several other direct meetings were held between Turkish and Iraqi leaders. Although these efforts failed to achieve their primary concern, this was expected as "the materialization probability is weak", as it was said in the document prepared to brief the Prime Minister by the military and the foreign affairs ministry.[40] The Turkish insistence on convincing the Iraq regime of the need for reforms illustrates the degree of its discomfort about the instability.

Secondly, Turkey also explored the possibilities of a non-military and a multilateral solution through international organizations. It can be argued that Turkey wanted to use the UN in two ways. Firstly, as a basis for its anti-war and pro-stability attitudes, and secondly to see whether or not the UN would pass a resolution legitimizing a war against Iraq. By keeping contacts alive with the UN, Turkey for a long time tried to observe the opinions of

the international community. When the US's demands reached Turkey in late November or early December, the UN's position was still not clear. Turkey, by adapting itself to some degree to the UN's position, was able to alleviate US pressure and delay its decision.

Furthermore, Turkey tried to move the issue into other international organization. Although nobody in Ankara seemed to be convinced about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the Turkish government was warning US authorities about a possible missile attack. On 15 January, the US demanded AWACS early warning planes and Patriot missiles from NATO for the defence of Turkey against a possible Iraqi missile attack. However, the US did not find the support it had expected. While the joint opposition of Germany, France and Belgium angered the United States, Turkey said it tolerated their attitude. NATO was demanding a formal request from Turkey, but Turkey was not asking.[41]

That seems to be as an obvious contradiction. However, when the real intentions of Turkish leaders are considered, the Turkish attitude was a well-planned example of transcending the issue of a unilateral destabilizing war to a multilateral institution. With this, Turkey aimed to acquire at least one of two preferable interdependent

outcomes. The first one was to acquire the necessary tools and time to make the war difficult for the US or, if possible, to stop this unilateral destabilizing war. The second one, if the first was not achieved, required a broader consensus in the UN in order to justify its refusal of the US's demands and to alleviate US pressure. In bilateral negotiations Turkey found itself in an isolated position and under pressure from the superpower. The absence of an alternative partner for Turkey with its limited capabilities relative to the superpower left the Turkish government with only a small manoeuvring space. The terms in the two-sided negotiations turned out to be a matter of take it or leave it. While Turkey did not want to take the first option, rejecting the superpower would be costly and risky. Moving the issue to the multilateral structure of NATO and the disagreement between the US and the other NATO member states was an opportunity for Turkey to share the burden of the US's pressure with other NATO members. The main motive behind the Turkish attitude during the NATO discussions was to prevent a unilateral war that would destroy stability or cause chaos, or if that was not achieved at least to acquire an excuse for not supporting the superpower.

Thirdly, Turkey increased its bilateral contacts with the UN Security

Council member states which were also influential actors. For this end, and for other reasons, Tayyip Erdoğan visited Russia on 24 December, despite reciprocal visits being rare in the history of relations between the two states. Next, on 14 January, he visited China. This visit was also interesting when the loose connections between Turkey and China are considered. According to Davutoğlu, these visits were done in order to "take the pulse of other UNSC member states."[42] These visits to Russia and China in any case were not targeting US power. As properly put by Hill and Taşpınar:

> Behind the scenes, Turkish-Russian relations have steadily improved over the last decade, particularly after March 2003 with a tactical decision by the Turkish Foreign Ministry and other parts of the Turkish state to explore a new rapprochement with Russia in Eurasia…. To be sure, there is little strategic depth to any of these couplings, and none of these quasi-alliances have coalesced into opposing blocs with the implication of some future military threat.[43]

Fourthly, Turkey started an initiative among the neighbouring countries of Iraq. On 4 January, Prime Minister Gül started his tour of the Middle East, first visiting Syria, Egypt and Jordan, and then Iran and Saudi Arabia. On 23 January, the foreign ministers of these six regional countries attended a summit held in Istanbul. This summit was the first of ten summits in the following three years. As explained by the foreign ministers of the participating states, and also in the declaration of the summit, the Middle Eastern countries aimed at reaching one of two solutions. First of them was, if possible, to form a regional forum (not an alliance) in order to take all the necessary steps for a peaceful solution. The second was that if the first solution failed and the war starts, to take the necessary steps to bring stability back to Iraq and the region.[44]

The Turkish government was carrying out negotiations with the United States while at the same time it was exploring ways of alleviating the pressure over on Ankara.

However, this initiative cannot be described as a soft or hard balancing behaviour. The day following the summit, Prime Minister Gül sent a letter to President Bush. In the succeeding meetings, the minor regional states that have close relations with the US, such as Kuwait and Bahrain, were consciously invited in order to soften the position of the initiative against the US.[45] Furthermore, at the eighth meeting held in Cairo, the D-8 also participated for the same reason. It was not an alliance against the US but a regional cooperative forum for stability.

The artificial and multi-ethnic character of Iraq makes this country open to both internal ethnic conflicts and external competence. Therefore Gül's statements in Syria turned out to be a slogan in explaining the necessity of the stability and the risks of instability. He declared that "Iraq is like a pandora's box. This box should not be opened because it would be impossible to put everything back in that box again." [46] In the words of Davutoğlu, who was seen as the architect of the regional initiative, "either the war started or not, these meetings were planned to continue until Iraq would be stabilized."[47]

The Final Track of Diplomatic Avoidance

Fifthly, the process of bilateral negotiations between Turkey and the US can be considered the final stage of the strategy of avoidance. Despite its efforts to break the unproductive circle of unipolarity, Turkey had to eventually face the negotiation process alone for three main reasons. The first was related to the possible risks of directly rejecting the US's demands. The second was related to the necessity of gaining time for a more desired solution. The third was related to gaining a preferable partnership with the US, if necessary.

Related to the first reason, Turkey was not in a position to directly reject the US's demands. Therefore, extending the negotiation process over a long period of time was a smart strategy. The US was so impatient that just five days after than the vote of confidence for the Gül government on 5 January, Marc Grossman and Paul Wolfowitz arrived in Ankara. Confused with the US's impetuousness, Gül asked for time by arguing that "we have just won the vote of confidence."[48] In the succeeding days and months, the US increased its pressure. Referring to the long partnership between the US and Turkey, Powell argued that the US had been helping Turkey for a long time and now it was Turkey's turn.[51] The pressure reached to the level of threat in the words of Mark Parris, the former US ambassador to Turkey. He claimed that "Turkey must support the US; otherwise, Washington does not reply even your phone calls."[49]

> Perhaps a postponement of the war until the summer in which the fighting would be riskier for the US could bring additional time to allow for the prevention of the war.

Under these circumstances, the Turkish government seemed to be unable to

directly reject the US's demands. The US was using all of its coercive power from its central position under the unipolar structure. The Turkish government was unofficially obliged to create the impression of taking part in a willing coalition, even though this was the worst case scenario for Turkey. For this reason, the Turkish government was carrying out negotiations with the United States while at the same time it was exploring ways of alleviating the pressure over on Ankara. As the prime minister of a newly established government, Gül in his response to Grossman and Wolfowitz, after explaining the newness of its government, also added that "even if we are a single party government, we need to persuade the National Assembly."[51] From the very first days of the negotiations until the last, the Gül government tried to transfer the liabilities of their reluctance to the National Assembly through emphasizing the democratic process which was declared by the US as one of the causes of the war against the Iraq.

Although there had been too many examples of the speeches in favour of the motion by both Gül and Erdoğan, a closer analysis reveals that actions taken by the same leaders displayed their reluctance. According to Murat Yetkin, "it can be argued that the government did not strive sufficiently to persuade the party group."[52] On the day of voting on the 1 March motion Under Secretary of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Uğur Ziyal and the Turkish chief negotiator Ambassador Deniz Bölükbaşı, whose opinions could have made the representatives more in favour of the motion,[53] were not allowed to inform the representatives about the final agreement reached in the negotiations with the United States, although they were invited to the parliament. "The government was acting as if not it did want the approval of its own motion."[54]

> Without the exchange of some reciprocal concessions, according to the central principle of alliance formation, the alliance would become a liability rather than an asset.

Secondly, that extended period of time came to be perceived by Turkey as a way of preserving stability. Although the negotiations can be traced back to the Ecevit government, it can be argued that the essential part of the negotiations started with the Wolfowitz and Grossman visit just after the approval of the Gül government in late November. In late December, Ambassador Marisa Lino on the US side and Ambassador Deniz Bölükbaşı on the Turkish side were

appointed as the official negotiators. However, the negotiation process was not progressing fast enough. Even the badges of the uniforms of the US soldiers, and the value-added taxes of the spaghetti and tomatoes which would be eaten by the US troops were included in the discussions and it was lasting a long time.[55]

The separation of the motion into two parts- the first was for site preparation and the second was for the transit of US troops- can be said to be another example of Turkey's delaying efforts.[56] The Turkish government interestingly asked for separating the motion into two parts. There might be both formal and informal reasons for doing this. However, it seems that this separation produced two interesting outcomes. First, it caused an extra postponement of the important part of the permission that was the transit of US troops from Turkish territories. Second, the United States became more dependent on the transit from the north after beginning the preparation of the military facilities. Despite continual warnings by the Turkish government that the passing of the first motion did not mean the automatic approval of the second, the US, with confidence, began to prepare for the Northern Front. Insistent warnings by the Turkish government were not quite meaningful.

All of these examples support the idea that the Turkish government tried to exploit the negotiation process in order to gain time and to bring other possible influential actors into the process. That would mean alternative partners for Turkey to collaborate with for a peaceful solution and the prevention of instability. That would mean a greater chance of persuading the Iraqi government to show the international community some collaborative actions which would to some extent force and convince the United States to find a peaceful multilateral solution. That would also mean providing an opportunity for the intervention of international organizations and a multilateral process instead of the unilateral US action, the outcome of which was difficult for Turkey to rely on. In addition, perhaps a postponement of the war until the summer in which the fighting would be riskier for the US could bring additional time to allow for the prevention of the war.[57] The possibility of the war and its instabilities were so disturbing that Turkey strived exhaustingly even though it was cognizant of the difficulty of achieving one of the above mentioned options.

Even if it seems that there was a conscious effort on the Turkish side of extending the negotiations compared to the US's efforts for urgency, this does not

necessarily require the existence of any secret agenda of Turkish side. Davutoğlu, emphasized the good will of the Turkish side and said that the:

> Turkish Government, by trying to do its best, laid the groundwork for the appearance of an international agreement through the postponement of a motion up to March that would otherwise come in December... Turkey used "constructive ambiguity" in that three-month period.... Because of the responsibility of the partnership, Turkey had anxieties not only about the purpose of the bargaining but also about persuading its *long standing partner*.... Turkey foresaw the explosion of *chaos*, the possibility of Iraq's disintegration after the war, and the difficulty of controlling this.[58]

Thirdly, and probably one of the most important issue, the negotiations with the US was perceived of as an opportunity for Turkey to formulate a plan B to the American initiative. When all the efforts at preventing the instability failed, Turkey was faced with the painful central reality of the unipolar structure. If the stability could not be preserved, then Turkey could have tried to gain some control over the process by making itself indispensable. This was the most critical part of the process as Turkey was required to finally accept the US's proposal or leave it. At this point, if it had increased its manipulative power on the both planning and implication stages of the war and worked with the superpower Turkey might have had an opportunity of not only decreasing the harmful effects of the war, but also the possibility of benefiting. Under such conditions, there would have been no reason for a Turkish rejection. However, this never happened as the US side would not make any concessions and the Turkish side was not convinced.

> The US was demanding Turkey to ally with it for a war which would probably drag Turkey into chaos; however, it was not offering any instruments for Turkey to defend itself in the chaotic environment.

Turkish perceptions of the US's approach did not stimulate optimistic views in increasing Turkish autonomy. Furthermore, the results of negotiations appeared to reduce the authority of the Turkish side in comparison with the US. Since forming alliances means transferring autonomy to some extent, any alignment must be based on common and certain grounds. Without the exchange of some reciprocal concessions, according to the central principle of alliance formation, the alliance would become a liability rather than an asset. The Turkish government was determined and declared its "red lines." The Turkish concerns can be divided into two main

groups. The first was related to the position of Turkey in the war and the second was about Iraq after the war.

Regarding the first concern, Turkish diplomats were insistently asking some specific questions about the planning stages and possible consequences of actual war.[59] However, according to Murat Yetkin, the US's answers were not convincing for the Turkish side: "The American authorities were strictly concentrating on their own demands while avoiding giving concrete answers to the questions of the Turkish side."[60] Turkey was worried about who would command Turkish troops in northern Iraq, the rules of engagement in a possible contact of Turkish troops with PKK militants, the weapons which would be given to the Kurdish Peshmergas by the US so and so forth. It seems that Turkey could not receive any convincing guarantees from the US side. Especially, "increasing concessions to the Kurds in Northern Iraq greatly contributed to this result."[61]

One of the most important issues about the lack of trust on the Turkish side was related to the number of troops which would pass from or reside on Turkish territories. The US was demanding to have more than 60.000 troops on Turkey's southeastern border. Such a great number was terrifying for Turkish policymakers. In a secret report prepared by the Turkish Foreign Ministry it was argued that:

> by accepting these demands, Turkey will appear to be hosting an invasion force for 4-5 years and probably just Kuwait will be the second example…. The increasing US presence in our country will gain a continuous character in conjunction with the US project to reconstruct the Middle East…. The capacity of our country to develop *policies which are peculiar to itself* as an important regional power and the regional authority of our country will diminish.[62]

According to many analysts, the Turkish lack of trust in the United States was confirmed by the US's actions especially after the war. Park argues that "as the chaos and political uncertainty in Iraq persist, the prospect of the country's dismemberment is indeed increasingly seen by some Americans as both a possible and even desirable outcome as an alternative to civil war or to the emergence of an autocratic and possibly theocratic state."[63]

Regarding the second concern, Turkey wanted to be informed about the future of Iraq after the war. What sort of policies would the US follow? Would Iraq's territorial integrity be preserved? What would happen to the Iraqi military? The disintegration of Iraq was the worst scenario circulating around since it could lead to the establishment of a Kurdish state. Turkish authorities were

not convinced enough on any of these concerns. Abdullatif Şener's statement, on 25 February, present interesting clues about the government's view of the progress made on the negations process as he said that "no nice gesture, no motion."[64]

The US was demanding Turkey to ally with it for a war which would probably drag Turkey into chaos; however, it was not offering any instruments for Turkey to defend itself in the chaotic environment. The negotiations seemed to be focusing on economic compensation. However, when the essential risks of the coming war were considered, the economic compensation was not sufficient to receive Turkish support. In fact it seems that the US did not consider the possibility of a rejection. Of course, the power asymmetry may give the stronger side greater capability and self-confidence. When the two sides are not mutually dependent upon each other the stronger side is expected to make only minor concessions. For obtaining larger concessions, the weaker side should be seriously appreciated by the stronger side. As Görener points out "the preponderance of its military strength deludes the US into believing that it does not need allies."[65]

Josef Joffe explains the US behaviour based on this self-confidence as follows:

"Moving unopposed and, then several military technological orbits above the rest, it needed merely, assistants, not allies. And so Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld would famously proclaim that the mission determines the coalition and not the other way round. Alliance was now *ad hoc* and a la carte."[66] The US demanded single-sided Turkish assistance, did not offer an alliance between two equal partners, and did not respond to Turkish concerns.

Turkey, while struggling to protect its autonomy, developed soft and aggressive strategies of avoidance mainly because of its concerns on the possible outcomes of the approaching instability.

Under these circumstances, it was difficult for Turkey to accept the US's proposal. Yet chaos as a result of war was approaching. In order to offset the side effects of the chaos, Turkey tried to increase its manipulative power and determinative role by seeking the possibility of forming at least a meaningful, if not an equal, partnership. Turkey, unfortunately, after its all efforts on all different diplomatic track, was faced with the painful realities of

unipolarity. Yet, Turkey was worried about the risks of rejecting the US and being excluded from the process of a transformation in its region. In the final stage, Turkey had to make a decision between being excluded or included. In conclusion, it rejected being dragged into the approaching instability as an assistant to the US in a way that would make Turkey weaker. Park clearly reaches to the same conclusion:

> As war approached, it became increasingly evident that there would be no regional groundswell of support for US-led action against Iraq. In any case, whatever the outcome of any war, Turkey would continue to inhabit the region, and would need to rebuild any fractured relationships with its neighbors, Arab and Iranian…. [The] Turks were concerned about the implications for regional stability of any new war with Iraq, and of its own potential isolation in the region. The crisis served as an acute reminder that Turkey is a Middle Eastern as much as it is a western state.[67]

Conclusion

In order to make sense of the Turkish refusal to allow the US to use its territory on 1 March, we need to go back to the roots of Turkish position in the unipolar structure of the international system. This article has argued that Turkey, while struggling to protect its autonomy, developed soft and aggressive strategies of avoidance mainly because of its concerns on the possible outcomes of the approaching instability. Focusing on the available evidence has illustrated that by developing five tracks of diplomatic contacts Ankara proactively avoided the US's demands. This kind of behaviour can best be described as a soft and aggressive policy rather than any kind of balancing or bandwagoning.

Further research is certainly required, especially the formal declaration from the Turkish National Assembly's records for the secret sessions held on the motion on 1 March. In fact, ten years has already passed, and according to the National Assembly regulations the records of closed sessions are expected to be published after ten years, which could provide new evidence to retest and revisit the arguments developed in this article.

Endnotes

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