LUISS

Corso di laurea magistrale in International Relations

Cattedra History of International Relations

Turkey ’ s Foreign Policy since Özal ’ s era and its Rivalry with Egypt over Regional Hegemony in the Middle East

rof.ssa Maria Elena Cavallar

RELATORE

·of.ssa Francesca Maria Corra

CORRELATORE

Angelo Padula Matr. 656062

CANDIDATO

Anno Accademico 2024/2025

Index

Introduction

Turkey's foreign policy since the beginning of the Özal's era has been characterized by a deep transformation. From the liberal and internationalist new orientation prompted by Turgut Özal to the strategic assertiveness of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Ankara has gradually moved away from its traditional alignment based on Western dependency to embrace a more autonomous, militarized, and regionally ambitious approach. This pathway has not only reshaped Turkey's international position but has also generated new rivalries and challenges, of which the most significant it that with Egypt. The Turkish-Egyptian confrontation over leadership in the Middle East is telling of this ideological divergence, regime survival strategies, and structural competition in the Mediterranean.

The central research question of this thesis is:

"*How has Turkey's foreign policy evolved since Özal's era, and why has it led to a geopolitical rivalry with Egypt over regional hegemony in the Middle East?"* and the core argument advocated here is that Turkey's foreign policy has undergone a strategic and ideological shift, moving from liberal-internationalist aspirations to a militarized and assertive posture. Özal's reforms opened new opportunities and sought to reconcile Islamic identity with Western orientation. The instability of the 1990s prevented the development of a coherent grand strategy but prepared the ground for the following AKP's ambitious project. In fact, under the AKP, an initial phase of Islamic liberalism positioned Turkey as a model of compatibility between Islam, democracy, and neoliberal economics. However, the collapse of this model – represented by the failure of the Arab Spring and the fall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 – made Ankara moving towards securitization, authoritarian consolidation, and reliance on hard power. Egypt's antagonism developed from this evolution, with Cairo emerging as the main barrier to Ankara's regional ambitions through its counter-revolutionary stance, also in protection of its Arab world's traditional stabilizer and leading role.

This thesis relies on a qualitative analysis combining existing literature with primary sources. It examines parliamentary interventions, government members' statements, both video-recorded and written, international treaties, diplomatic correspondence, press articles, party programs, and policy reports. While the existing literature has offered foundational insights into

specific moments or dimensions of Turkey's foreign policy, it often lacks some nuances that only a deeper engagement with the primary sources can provide. Notably, the insightful academic works from which I drew focus either on single phases, or on thematic issues, or are not able to provide an extensive account that traces the continuity and ruptures across four decades and until present. By systematically integrating primary sources the elaborate aim to fill this gap by capturing the language through which policies were justified in real time, the shifting ideological vocabularies and the intertwining between the domestic debates and international choices, which ultimately also facilitate the creation of a bridge between the different decades.

This elaborate is organized in four chapters, following a chronological and thematic progression designed to identify the long-term transformation of Turkish foreign policy from the Özal era – which in my view marks the first real rupture from rigid Kemalist orthodoxy - and its turning into rivalry with Egypt.

Chapter 1 examines the Turgut Özal era, analyzing how his reforms redefined Turkey's foreign policy horizons throughout the 1980s and at the end of the Cold War. This chapter is essential because it shows the first departure from rigid Kemalist orthodoxy and provides the intellectual foundations for later changes.

Chapter 2 addresses the 1990s, a decade of political instability and strategic uncertainty. Although sometimes perceived as a period of stagnation, it is studied here as a transitional phase that prepared the ground for more assertive activism in the 2000s

Chapter 3 explores the AKP's reorientation of Turkish foreign, describing the evolution from Islamic liberalism ideology to authoritarian securitization and the growing reliance on hard power. This chapter highlight the ideological and structural transformation that most directly has shaped Ankara's current new role in the Middle East.

Chapter 4 focuses on the rivalry with Egypt, analyzing its ideological, strategic and geopolitical dimensions and situating it within the broader transformation of the Mediterranean balance of power.

On this ground, the thesis demonstrates that the current rivalry is not an isolated phenomenon but the culmination of a longer transformation in Turkey's foreign policy evolution, which is strongly intertwined with the domestic events - whose analysis is foundational to understand the external outcomes - and whose future perspectives will not be easy to predict due to its intertwining with broader regional strategic dynamics and other powers' interests.

Part I – Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: From Özal to the AKP

Chapter 1 – Turgut Özal's Era and the End of the Cold War

The first chapter of the first section of the thesis analyzes the foundations and implications of Özal's foreign policy vision. It begins by contextualizing his rise to power within the post-September 12, 1980 coup domestic environment and describes the ways in which his economic reforms reshaped Turkey's international image and perspective. Then it explores Turkey's relations with the United States, the Middle East, the post-Soviet space, the more complex interactions with the European Community, and the unresolved disputes with Greece and Cyprus.

Özal's era constituted the opening of a new diplomatic age for Turkey. Characterized by broader country's strategic horizons, and a redefined identity as both Western and non-Western. It will be argued that Özal laid the groundwork for the debates that defined Turkish foreign policy for the following decades. Notably, Özal's legacy, will be presented as both ambitious and contested, but indispensable for understanding Turkey's turn from the reactive caution of the Cold War to the assertive and competitive stance of the twenty-first century.

1.1 A Visionary Between Two Worlds: Introducing Turgut Özal and his scene

The 1980 Military Coup and Özal's Rise

The military coup of 12 September 1980 – the third since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 – was a reaction to the developments of the 1970s. The army aimed to suppress terrorism and radicalism; to restore economic growth and stability; to introduce a new constitution and a legal stabilizing framework which would prevent anarchy; and to re-establish a civilian democracy on a solid Kemalist basis.[1] In particular, in the years between 1977 and 1980, Turkey seemed doomed to a total political and economic collapse due to the rising of political terrorism from both right and left extremisms, coupled with a skyrocketing inflation and huge deficits in the balance of payments. An instability which also affected Turkey's capacity to exert an effective

[1] Koru, S. (2011). Turgut Özal period in Turkish foreign policy: Özalism. *USAK Yearbook of Politics and International Relations*, p.153-156

foreign policy, since it became constrained by chronic domestic political and economic instability and lacking a long-haul planification.[2] "The military intervention […] took place because the State was no longer able to exercise its essential functions once political polarization had degenerated into armed struggle", Özal argued[3].

Indeed, General Kenan Evren did not envisage a permanent military regime but rather to play the role of the guarantor of the principles of the Republic, its Kemalist regime and its unity. Contrary to previous attempts to restore Kemalism, Kenan's Kemalism was more pragmatic and less autocratic. The declared scopes were to preserve national unity, to reduce conflict among citizens and prevent possible civil war, to restore the authority of the state, and to prompt a democratic system. It was pro-Western and pro-American, keen to keep the American alliance and to fear the Soviet Union as the greatest possible threat for Turkish security and convinced to adhere to a capitalist economic orientation rather than to a socialist one. Bülent Ulusu formed the first government, and Turgut Özal was called to join it as Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs.[4]

The 1981 immediately demonstrated to be successful for the new military-controlled administration. Indeed, economic outcomes showcased an inflation drop, increase in exports, and a GDP increase by 4.5%. Legitimizing the Turkish National Security Council (NSC) to propose a new constitution, written by the military, to a national referendum in 1982. Whose success made Kenan Evren the new President and conferred NSC extraordinary powers over government and parliament.[5]

The NSC abolished the two major political parties of the 1970s (RPP and JP) and banned all old political leaders from re-joining politics[6]. Political organizations based on religion, regional representation or Marxism were forbidden. And new names were encouraged to candidate.

---

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Özal, T. (1991). *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Revised English ed.). K. Rustem & Brother. p. 301

[4] Koru, S. (2011). Turgut Özal period in Turkish foreign policy: Özalism. *USAK Yearbook of Politics and International Relations*, p.153-156; Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy since 1774* (3rd ed.). Routledge. p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War: Foreign policy and Western alignment in the modern Republic*. I.B. Tauris, chapter 8-9.

[5] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 156; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 171-183.*

[6] *Siyasal Partiler Kanunu* [Political Parties Law], Law No. 2820, 22 April 1983.

Before 1983 elections, aiming to restore a civilian ruling[7], a new moderate right-wing party, the *Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi* (National Democracy Party, NDP), and moderate left-wing party, the *Halkçi Parti* (Populist Party, PP*)* were established. The NDP, led by a former general, was the Evren and army's choice[8]. However, when Özal - a prestigious and well-known statist, held responsible for the successful economic reforms of the previous years - formed his own party, the *Anavatan Partisi, ANAP* (Motherland Party, MP), it comfortably won the 1983 elections with 45% of the votes and 212 out of 400 seats in parliament[9].

In Özal's view, "The party belonged to neither of the two principal political movements which had been in existence since the end of the Ottoman Empire", it rejected from the start "the dichotomy inherited from the past and which it felt had no relevance to the present", but "accepted into its ranks adherents of old movements in order to form, with their participation, a new synthesis, while at the same time trying to establish cordial relations with the other political parties"[10]. Indeed, 1983 marked the beginning of the ten-year lasting Özal era which would transform Turkey's society, economy and politics radically - once military gradually lost its grip – and the beginning of a new form of foreign policy known as *Özalism* or *neo-Ottomanism*.[11]

Özal's Ideological Vision

Turgut Özal was not just a politician, but rather a synthesis of Turkey's contradictions. At once a devout Muslim with ties to Nakşibendi order and a Western-trained technocrat, he and his party embodied a unique blend of religious conservatism, economic liberalism, and institutional pragmatism. He believed that "ANAP is not a party of status-quo which is wrongly associated with cultural conservatism in Turkey", that is associate with an inflexible defense of traditions and a rejection of modernization. Instead, he envisaged ANAP as a dynamic political force which could

[7] Also as a consequence of the increasing pressure from the Western world. Although, only three out of seventeen parties were allowed to run in the elections.

[8] Kutalmış Yalçın, A. (2018). *Nationalist Democracy Party in the Turkish Political Life (1983–1986)* [Türk Siyasal Hayatında Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi (1983–1986)]. *The Journal of Academic Social Science*

[9] Walsh, E. (1983, November 7). *Turkish voters apparently deal rulers a rebuff*. The Washington Post.

[10] Özal, T. (1991). *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Revised English ed.). K. Rustem & Brother. p.306

[11] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 156; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 171-183.*

draw from its own cultural heritage and, through a strong intellectual effort, "to reassess, reinterpret, readjust, and further develop traditional value of the people in the light of the present conditions of civilization"[12]. That is to say, tradition should be actively reinterpreted to meet the needs of modern society and allow Turkey to embrace economic liberalization and political reform, while remaining anchored in it historical and cultural identity, and not to defend the existing military-bureaucratic order or resist change.

As Zürcher notes, he "had a foot in both camps"[13], but in truth, Özal had a foot in many: he was a successful private sector manager in the 1970s, a bureaucrat with strong connections to the IMF and World Bank (where between 1971-1973 he was adviser for special projects), and ultimately a political figure who could comfortably navigate Islamist circles and secular military elites alike. Another distinctive aspect of Özal was his Americanism. Indeed, educated in the United States, where he pursued a MSc in electrical engineering in the 1953 at Texas Tech University (Lubbock, Texas). He developed a clear admiration for the American system: he viewed the liberalism of the United States as one of the core reasons for its success, and as such "the task of State is to leave the commercial and economic activities to the able hands of individuals and provide, or facilitate, the provisions of the infrastructure needed to make their work easier"[14]. And likening it to the Ottoman Empire, he believed that both systems were examples of cultural diversity and freedom to practice different religions and economic activities. Ultimately meaning that Turkey should move away from its authoritarian state structure[15], rooted in Kemalist ideology, and toward a more open and pluralistic model.[16]

It is important to highlight the significant contrast between the Turkish civilization perspective of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and that of Turgut Özal. That is how the two leaders framed Turkey's cultural identity in relationship with the wider world: which values, institutions, and

---

[12] Özal, T. (1991). *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Revised English ed.). K. Rustem & Brother. p. 308-310

[13] Zürcher, in Koru, 158

[14] "[and] that one of the highest benefits provided by the free market economy, lifting limitations on imports, allowing local entrepreneurs to acquaint themselves with new products, endeavoring to improve the quality of goods to a level that will enable them to compete with imported products, and being receptive to innovations so as to fully utilize their own potential". Organization of Islamic Cooperation. *Report and Resolutions of the Seventh Session of the COMCEC (Istanbul, 6–9 October 1991).* Istanbul: COMCEC p.105-107

[15] "the role of the state, as central authority, will gradually diminish during the 21st century. Individuals and individual rights will take their place at the forefront". See Istanbul: COMCEC, 1991, p.105

[16] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 158-159, 163; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195.*

historical traditions should be taken into account to inspire Turkish modernization, and with which kind of civilization Turkey should align itself.

Notably, while Atatürk and the early Republican elite sought to construct a secular and Westernized Turkish Republic by distancing it from its Ottoman and Islamic past – which they associated with political decline, corruption, and poverty – Özal did not view progress as exclusively tied to Western civilization, nor did he accept the binary choice between European and Turkish identities. Instead, Özal argued that Turkey was both Muslim and European by nature, and that it did not need to abandon its cultural or religious roots to align with the European societies. Rather, the backwardness of Turkey stemmed from a historical lack of liberalism and scientific thinking and copying with that could have allowed Turkey to immediately adopt the fruits of the Western Enlightenment, such as democracy, human rights, and technological advancement, without contrasting with Turkish culture.[17]

This conviction, shaped Özal approach to European integration. In his view, Europe should accept Turkey as it is: a distinct, Muslim-majority society with a long civilization legacy whose Islamic devotion must be distinguished culturally and politically from Arab counterparts, and that may serve as a bridge between Islamic values and Western democratic norms.[18] At the same time, Özal sought to address domestic skepticism toward the West insisting that a full membership in the European Community would enhance democracy, strengthen the economy, and secure national stability[19]. A choice that would not serve only geopolitical interests but also reconnect Turkish identity with global modernity. "We are destined by geography to live together with and in Europe, whether or not we enter the Community", he argued[20].

[17] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 158-159, 163.

[18] In his framework, Islam was not a barrier but a soft power asset that could help integrate Turkey more deeply into the Western System. Özal advocated for a Turkish version of Islam and a more inclusive model of secularism which, shaped by Anatolian Sufism and Ottoman pluralism, was moderate, tolerant of religious diversity and reconcilable with democracy, liberalism, and capitalism. See Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 158-159, 163.

[19] Formal application for full membership would be submitted in 1987, see infra. Paragraph 1.5

[20] Özal, T. (1991). *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Revised English ed.). K. Rustem & Brother. p. 287

In this view, the Ottoman heritage could make Turkey a *trait d' union* between both its Western and Eastern neighbors[21]through shared historical and cultural bonds and positioned it as a potential mediator and stabilizing force in the region.[22]

Economic Transformation of the 1980s

The 1980 Kemalist military coup cleared the way for his ascent. Banning all major political rivals such as Demirel, Ecevit, Türkeş, and Erbakan, not only it paved the way for Özal to develop his vision but also helped him legitimize his position and enabled the implementation of wide-ranging economic reforms under the army's authoritarian umbrella. This exceptional political environment, that characterized Turkey's 1980s, allowed Özal to focus on pressing national issues and propose ambitious and liberal reforms and to become one of the most dynamic and influential figures in modern Turkish political life. Indeed, during the 1980s, Turkey underwent a profound transformation marked by rapid economic growth and a structural shift toward industrialization. The country recorded an average annual growth rate exceeding 5%, the highest among OECD member states at the time. Turkish exports increased form $2.9 billion in 1980 to over $20 billion by the early 1990s and, notably, their composition changed: while in 1980 industrial product accounted for 41.1% of exports, by 1990 they represented 84%, signaling a major shift from Turkey's traditionally agricultural export profile. Imports also grew significantly, rising from $7.9 billion to $22.5 billion between 1980 and 1990. The tourism sector, once marginal, became a key source of foreign currency, expanding from $212 million in 1980 to nearly $3 billion a decade later. Similarly, Turkish construction companies increased their international presence, especially in the Middle East, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. Turkey succeeded also in becoming an important market for direct foreign investment and the Istanbul Stock Exchange was now considered one of the most prominent financial hubs in south-eastern Europe[23]. These

[21] In particular, Özal reformulated Turkism as a key element in both domestic identity construction and foreign policy strategy. Not a rigid and defensive nationalism of the early Republican period, but instead a cultural and economic framework aimed at fostering cooperation among the newly independent Turkic republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. In Özal's view, these latters, despite their relative economic weakness, represented an opportunity for regional alignment based on mutual support, where Turkey could emerge as a natural leader.

[22] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 158-159, 163; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195.*

[23] The economic growth of the 1980s gave rise, besides prosperity, to a stronger demand for political inclusion which empowered a new wave of democratization that this time went beyond the traditional state elites to include broader

developments transformed Turkey into what was widely regarded as a miracle economy of the 1980s.[24]

Undeniably, under Özal, Turkey began to regain the national self-confidence it had lost during the troubled 1970s, and this enthusiasm would have been soon extended to foreign policy, as the country began to assert itself as a regional power.[25]

Two Phases of Özal's Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of the Özal era can be generally divided into two phases[26], which reflect a shift in priorities.

The first phase, from 1983 to 1989, the Özal's government concentrated primarily on domestic challenges, such as economic liberalization, the consolidation of civilian authority and the restauration of political stability after the coup. During this period, Kenan Evren, serving as President of the Republic (1982-1989), occupied a political dominant position and a strong role in guiding state policy, meaning that Özal, when he became Prime Minister in December 1983, inherited a system in which civilian authority was still under pressure from the military-backed presidency.[27]

Despite these limitations, Özal's governments – the first from 1983 to 1989 and the second from 1989 to 1993 – gradually expanded Turkey's civilian-led modernization which would later shape his foreign policy vision, whose "essence [...] to ensure the continuity of peace in our region [and] and to play a more active role in its relations with the Western world, to which it belongs in terms of political, military and economic cooperation" was already evident in the ANAP

segments of society. Among the beneficiaries, were previously marginalized communities of Balkan, Caucasian, and Central Asian origin which organize themselves in associations and lobbying organizations supportive for their domestic and transnational interests, that became of national foreign policy concern, such as the Bosnian War or the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These issues became particularly relevant during the 1990s, see chapter 2

[24] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 158-159, 163; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195.*

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] During these years, foreign affairs were also managed by Vahit Melih Halefoğlu, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the first Özal's Cabinet, and by Ahmet Mesut Yılmaz, who served in the second one.

[27] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195*

manifesto[28]. This institutional composition helps explain why Özal's foreign policy during this period remained largely reactive and possibly constrained by the progressively residual military oversight, which contributed to convey an international perception of Turkey concerned over human rights violations and the suppression of political freedoms.[29]

By contrast, in the second phase, from 1989 to 1993, following Özal's election to the presidency, and the broader transition toward full democratic normalization, foreign policy assumed a central role in his political agenda. Notwithstanding the new government leader was Yıldırım Akbulut, and the 1982 constitution prevented the President from having much power in foreign affairs, Özal was able to maneuver behind the scenes[30] due to a weak political opposition from inside and outside the party.[31]

With the end of the Cold War, and the fading of the USSR threat, Turkey, whose attachment with the Western alliance was mainly related to security reasons, found itself in a new international environment and possibly in a new uncomfortable isolated position from the Western world that Özal viewed as an opportunity.[32]

From his perspective, the collapse of the communist bloc freed the Turkish republics and removed the barriers in neighboring regions – including countries such as Bosnia, Azerbaijan, Albania, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Romania, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, which were now looking to Ankara - that had previously prevented Turkey from developing closer relations. These countries, with the end of the bipolar system, could no longer rely on the protection or assistance of the superpowers. In this vacuum, shared cultural, religious, and ethnic ties acquired greater political and strategic significance. As a consequence, Turkey became a center of attraction for Turkic peoples, Muslims, and former Ottoman populations. This became evident with the outbreaks of the Bosnian and Karabakh crises: while Serbs received support from Greece and Russia, Turkey appeared as a natural ally for the Muslim population of

---

[28] Anavatan Partisi. *Anavatan Partisi programı* [Political party program]. Ankara: ANAP Yayınları, p.83

[29] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195*

[30] Akbulut was an Özal's personal choice and as such rather a figurehead.

[31] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195*

[32] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195;* Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 14-16

former Yugoslavia; Similarly, in the Caucasus, while Russians sided with Armenians, Azerbaijanis turned to their Muslim and Turkic kin for help.[33]

The Soviet strategic withdrawal also changed the regional balance of power. The centuries-old Turkish-Russian border ceased to exist, and Turkey saw its main threat moving away now focusing on its internal problems. Moreover, Russian control over the northern and northeastern shores of the Black Sea ended, and the area was now shared by Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey, and Russia. The emergence of an independent Ukraine balanced Russian power in the Black Seas and gave Turkey more leverage about the Straits. In the Caucasus the previous Russian regional monopoly now gave the room also for the actorness of Turkey and Iran.[34]

Under these conditions, Ankara had an opportunity to increase its investments and exports in the region. The emergence of the Turkic world was the most significant development for Turkey in the post-Cold War period. The Turkish peoples of the former Soviet Union were freed from 150 years of Russian rule, and Turkey considered these republics as a way to overcome its isolation: being the most developed between them, Turkey envisioned itself in a leadership position, particularly after recognizing Western countries' indifferent attitude[35], and having the opportunity to persuade the West itself of Turkey's post-Cold War relevance in the new international order through its leverage within the Islamic and Turkic world. To further foster the economic penetration in the region, the Özal government favored the creation of regional cooperation institutions, such as the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC).[36]

Finally, the Gulf War gave Özal's administration the opportunity to show to the West Turkey's importance in the Middle East. The war showed neatly the different attitude between the Republican-Kemalist foreign policy, based on the principle of non-interference in the Middle Eastern states' domestic affairs and inter-states and Arab disputes, and the Özalist one, more keen to actively play a role within the Western security system, and underlined the importance of

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] The tepid Western attitude also reduced domestic resistance to Özal's regional policies even among pro-Western segments in Turkey.

[36] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195;* Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 14-16

Turkey, especially to the United States[37], as bulwark against instability and fundamentalism in the Middle East and Central Asia.[38]

1.1 Anchoring the Alliance: Özal and the United States

Since the onset of the Cold War, Turkey played a key role in the U.S. security and containment strategy, serving as a frontline on the Southern flank of NATO, and receiving substantial military and economic aid under the *Truman Doctrine* and the *Marshall Plan*. Turkey joined NATO In 1952 and, since then, hosted crucial U.S. military facilities, such as the Incirlik Air Base, and the *Jupiter* nuclear missiles, installed in 1961[39]. This partnership was, however, characterized by recurring crises, particularly over the Cyprus dispute. Notably, the first rupture occurred with *President Lyndon B. Johnson's letter* of June 1964, which warned Ankara against using American-supplied weapons in a possible intervention in Cyprus[40]. Then, tensions rose again after the 1974 Turkish military operation in Cyprus, which led the United States Congress to impose an arms embargo on Turkey between 1975 and 1978, and fuel reciprocal mistrust between Ankara and Washington.[41]

Nevertheless, the early 1980s marked a turning point in Turkish-American relations, and the 1980 military coup provided an unexpected opportunity to repristinate bilateral relationships. Unlike European actors, the United States took a relatively supportive stance toward the coup, seeing it as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism and domestic communism.[42]

---

[37] See infra, paragraph 1.3.

[38] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195;* Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 14-16

[39] Although these latter were removed after the next year *Cuban Missile Crisis* following Kennedy's agreement with Khrushchev.

[40] U.S. Department of State. (1964, June 5). *Telegram from President Johnson to Prime Minister İnönü* (Document No. 54). In *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVI: Cyprus; Greece; Turkey*. U.S. Government Printing Office

[41] Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 83-84, 89, 91, 99, 107, 116-117

[42] Especially in light of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan of 1979 and the Iranian Revolution. After the Islamic Revolution Turkey became the only Western ally in the region. See Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 172-177; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 120-121; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195*

This strategic shift was institutionalized with the signing of a new *Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement* (DECA) in March 1980, which facilitated U.S. access to numerous military bases across Turkey, including İncirlik (Adana), Sinop, and Pirinçlik, which became critical assets for NATO and U.S. operations throughout the Cold War's finale decade. The DECA also paved the way for significant American military and economic assistance. Turkey, received $5.27 billion[43] in total U.S. security assistance between 1980 and 1990.[44]

The rise of Turgut Özal added a new dimension to the relationship. Being an admirer of the U.S. model, Özal embraced Reaganite economic policies, sought to modernize Turkey's economy and defense sector, and actively supported NATO integration. His government prompted the development of a solid defense industry and launched projects such as the 1987 Turkish-American[45] F-16 production program, positioning Turkey not only as a defense consumer but as a regional arms producer, with exports to countries like Egypt and Pakistan. Moreover, Turkish exports to the U.S. rose steadily from $127 million in 1980 to $971 million in 1989, while imports from the U.S. reached over $2 billion by the end of the decade and, although, the balance of trade remained unequal, clearly the U.S. became one of the Turkey's most significant commercial partners, reinforcing the strategic component of the relationship with economic interdependence.[46]

From a purely political point of view, while Turkish-American relations experienced a revival during Ronald Reagan's first term, "a long-overdue revitalization in U.S.-Turkish relations"[47], driven by shared strategic concerns over the Soviet threat and instability in the Middle East, this relationship proved difficult to sustain in the second half of the decade.

Indeed, in 1985, Raegan praised Özal and President Evren for their ability in "rebuilding democratic institutions and rekindling economic growth", and besides reaffirming "firm commitment" into NATO cooperation he believed he was time to "strengthen and broaden U.S.-Turkish relations" and "getting to know [Turkey] better as a trading partner and for growing opportunities in finance and investment"[48]. However, if Raegan's initially hardline stance against

---

[43] Making it the third-largest recipient after Israel and Egypt.

[44] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 172-177; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 120-121; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195.

[45] In collaboration with General Dynamics

[46] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 172-177; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 120-121; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195.

[47] Reagan, R. (1985, April 2). *Remarks following discussions with Prime Minister Turgut Özal of Turkey*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum.

[48] *Ibid.*

Moscow elevated Turkey's geopolitical importance, the rising of Gorbachev and the consequent thawing of Cold War tensions diminished Turkey's strategic indispensability in the eyes of the Americans.[49]

At the same time, Greek and Armenian lobbies within the U.S. Congress began to exert growing influence and actively worked to constrain U.S. support for Turkey, particularly by influencing military aid allocations. One clear outcome of this pressuring was the adoption of the 10:7 aid ratio, whereby every $10 of assistance to Turkey had to be matched by $7 to Greece. Moreover, the attempts to pass several Armenian Genocide resolutions during the mid-1980s, though never formally passed, contributed to generate widespread resentment in Turkey. Indeed, these initiatives provoked strong domestic recoil, including calls to withdraw from Nato. In 1987, in response to renewed congressional efforts to pass a genocide resolution, President Kenan Evren cancelled a planned state visit to Washington, and Ankara imposed temporary restriction on the U.S. use of İncirlik Air Base.[50]

Despite these tensions, Özal remained committed to cultivating a special partnership with the United States, also by developing personal friendship with Reagan and Bush sr.[51], and the Gulf War in the early 1990s offered a new opening to re-enforce the alliance, as it will be furtherly described in the next paragraph and next chapter.[52]

1.2 From Caution to Engagement: Turkey and the Middle East

European hesitations over Turkey's domestic politics after the 1980 military coup pushed Ankara to look beyond its traditional partners and to deepen its ties with other possible regional partners including Balkan, Black Sea, and the Middle East countries. In particular, it was in the Middle East that economic relations expanded most dramatically. Özal's strategy towards Middle

[49] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 172-177; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 120-121; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Bush, G. H. W. (1991, March 26). *Remarks following discussions with President Turgut Özal of Turkey*. In *Public papers of the Presidents of the United States: George H. W. Bush (1991, Book I, pp. 303–305)*. U.S. Government Publishing Office

[52] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 172-177; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 120-121; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195.

East countries was based on economic principles rather than ideology[53] and was persuaded of the Turkish capacity to bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean.[54]

Turkish imports from the Middle East rose from a mere $64 million in 1970 to over $2.8 billion by 1985. The rise was largely driven by energy dependency, as Turkey's domestic consumption grew and oil prices surged. Nonetheless, the current account was balanced by newly developed Turkey exports to the region that skyrocketed from $54 million in 1970 to over $3 billion in 1985, with the region absorbing 40% of Turkish exports that year. This economic boom extended beyond trade in goods. Libya emerged as the largest market, followed by Saudi Arabia and Iraq[55]. Turkish construction companies won over $18 billion in contracts across the Middle East between 1974 and 1990. The number of Turkish contractors operating in the region surged from just 22 in 1978 to over 300 by the mid-1980s.[56]

The expansion of economic activity also prompted massive labor migration. As Turkish companies demanded more workers abroad, the number of Turkish migrant laborers in the Middle East reached 250,000 at its peak, establishing the region as a vital component of Turkey's economic ecosystem.[57]

Both the Coup regime and Özal's government maintained neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), mostly to protect booming commercial interests on both sides[58]. Keeping good relations with Iraq was not a difficult task, since there were no serious mutual disputes, and rather a common interest in dealing against emerging Kurdish separatist movements during the 1980s that evolved in an agreement concluded in October 1984[59] which allowed Turkish forces to pursuit

---

[53] Notwithstanding he kept abiding by the traditional secular foreign policy, he made great effort to weave good relationships with Muslim countries: he encouraged Evren to accept the chairmanship of *Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation* (COMCEC) and took part both as Prime Minister and as President to several meeting of the OIC

[54] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195

[55] Turkey became one of the most significant creditors for both Iraq and Iran during the 1980-1988 war.

[56] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] The war made both Iran and Iraq heavily dependent on Turkey both as a supply source and as a transit route to the outside world.

[59] This agreement was a consequence of the beginning of the PKK revolt in Turkey in 1984, which may couple with the concurrent power vacuum in Iraqi Kurdistan. To know more about Özal's thought see infra paragraph 1.7

Partîya Karkerén Kurdîstan (PKK)[60] militants within Iraqi territory. Conversely, relations with Iran, after the falling of the Shah and the Iranian turning toward militant Islamist and anti-Western state, worsened being in neat opposition to Turkey's domestic and international alignments, and reached their negative peak between 1987 and 1989 when it became evident that Teheran had connections with Islamists in Turkey and Iranian media were critics against Turkey secularism and Kemalism. In this period, Turkey also declared Iran's ambassador to Ankara *persona non grata.*[61]

Either way, Ankara paid attention not to isolate Iran after the revolution to avoid letting Tehran enter Soviet sphere of influence. Indeed, after the US imposed trade embargo in November 1980, Turkey refused to follow suit. On the contrary, Özal's government signed the establishment of the *Economic Cooperation Organization* (ECO) with Tehran and Islamabad in 1985.[62]

Turkey gained huge economic benefits from the war: the exports to the two countries grew from $220 million in 1981 to over $2 billion in 1985, which consisted in more than a quarter of Turkey's total exports. Notwithstanding benefits began to decrease during 1986-1988 because of the economic hardships of both countries, this pragmatic approach reflected a broader departure from previous era: Turkey no longer viewed the Middle East exclusively as a zone of instability, but increasingly as a space for economic opportunity.[63]

The 1980 military regime adopted a more sympathetic stance toward the Palestinian cause, continuing relations with the PLO, which had opened an office in Turkey in 1976. Although concerns over the PLO's connections to Armenian (A*rmenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia*, ASALA) and Kurdish (PKK) militant groups nuanced this engagement. Consistently, Ankara distanced from Israel, announcing the downgrading of Ankara's representation in Israel from the level of *chargé d'affaires* to the minimum level of *second secretary*, and justifying the

[60] The political instability and violence of the 1970s provided fertile ground for the consolidation of Kurdish separatist movements, which began to call more explicitly for autonomy or independence. By the 1980s, under the leadership of the PKK, Kurdish separatism had evolved into a significant armed insurgency, with approximately 10,000 fighters and a broad base of sympathizers, and as the conflict intensified, the Kurdish question came to dominate the national political agenda.

[61] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] *Ibid*.

decision as a contestation of the adoption of the *Jerusalem Law*[64]. Turkey increasing economic dependence on the Arabs after the 1979-1980 oil crisis probably influenced the decision.[65]

Ankara also needed creditors willing to pay its oil bill which after the crisis had increased from $1,762 million to $3,857. The Western credits were insufficient, and Saudi Arabia stepped in with a loan of $250 million, which allegedly was conditioned to a different attitude towards the Palestinian question. Furthermore, the economic stabilization program implemented by the military administration and the different economic orientation towards an export-prevailing economy saw in the Arab states and their booming economies new promising market opportunity to be seized. Between 1980 and 1983 while Turkey's export to the Arab states increased, also to balance the current account against the large oil import quotas, the export to Israel steadily decreased, consisting of only 0.5 per cent of Turkey's total export to the Middle East.[66]

In 1982, Turkey hardly criticized Israel at the United Nations for the annexation Syrian's Golan Heights and its representative also blamed about Israel's "aggrandizement, illegal settlements and usurpation of the rights of others"[67]. An assertive stance which was however favored by a general political disapproval of Israeli actions in the early 1980s, which was also shared by the United States.[68]

It is commonly accepted that Turkey's relations with Israel never improved up until the end of the Lebanon War in 1985 which was criticized by Ankara's government. However, the war itself contributed to facilitate co-operation between the two countries: Israel occupation of the Southern Lebanon led to incidentally capture PLO basis, which revealed the training of Turkish terrorist groups and members of the ASALA, that constituted the basis for a secret intelligence co-operation between the two countries to contrast terrorism. Reagan administration allegedly played a crucial

[64] The law - officially passed by the Knesset on July 30, 1980 - declared Jerusalem capital of Israel.

[65] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Athanassopoulou, E. (2024). *Turkey's relations with Israel: The first sixty-two years, 1948–2010*. Routledge. p. 145-168

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] United Nations General Assembly, *9th Emergency Special Session: Record of Meeting Held on Friday, 5 February 1982, New York*, A/ES-9/PV.12 (New York: United Nations, 1982), p. 143, quoted in Athanassopoulou, E. (2024). *Turkey's relations with Israel: The first sixty-two years, 1948–2010*. Routledge, chapter 5

[68] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Athanassopoulou, E. (2024). *Turkey's relations with Israel: The first sixty-two years, 1948–2010*. Routledge, p. 145-168

role to foster this strategic cooperation to consolidate a U.S.-friendly bulwark in the Middle East to limit Soviet expansionism.[69]

Özal is the figure who is generally accepted to be responsible for Turkey's changing of orientation towards Israel. Indeed, even if officially relations resumed after the end of the Lebanon War, they discretely improved right before the mid-1980s. Both because Ankara saw in the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington a way to obtain US Congress support against Greek and Armenian lobbies which spoiled Turkey's image in the United States, as well as in the whole Western world[70], and also because Özal believed that a good relationship with Israel would be of example of Turkey's regional leadership.[71]

Ankara kept positive diplomatic relations also after the 1987 intifada and Israel's hard response, while never giving up its commitment to the Palestinian cause. It was amongst the firsts to recognize the state of Palestine in Gaza and West Bank, with its capital in East Jerusalem, when it was declared by the exiled-in-Algiers PLO on 15 November 1988.[72]

Notwithstanding Israeli disappointment, Ankara continued demonstrating its engagement with the Hebrew state by promoting commercial relations. In 1988, bilateral trade skyrocketed and reached $130 million. In the last years of 1980s, Turkey realized that keeping a low level diplomatic representation with Israel was not sustainable anymore also because of the increasing pressure coming from the Jewish-American lobby. This posed Ankara in the hard situation to find a way to not jeopardize its relations with Arab countries. But finally, the improvements in the Arab-Israeli peace process, the PLO's acceptance of Israel's existence and the principle of a "two states" solution in 1988, and the first session of the Peace Conference in Madrid in October 1991 eased the conditions to restore diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level, that were seized by the Demirel government[73] on 19 December.[74]

---

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] See infra. Paragraph 1.6

[71] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Athanassopoulou, E. (2024). *Turkey's relations with Israel: The first sixty-two years, 1948–2010*. Routledge, p. 145-168

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] The concurrent ending of the Cold War made it easier to develop good relations with both sides of the Arab-Israeli dispute, since it was not anymore a superpower siding concern.

[74] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Athanassopoulou, E. (2024). *Turkey's relations with Israel: The first sixty-two years, 1948–2010*. Routledge, p. 145-168

Relations with Syria and Lebanon were also difficult - because of their support for separatist and Marxist groups[75], and because of the dispute over Euphrates and Tigris water flows (*Southeast Anatolia Project*) – and worsened in the late 1980s. Turkish dam projects in the South-east were seen by Syria and Iraq, the downstream countries, which were able to gather a strong Arab solidarity, as threatening to their water security[76]. In 1987, when Turkey finally began the construction of the *Atatürk Dam* on Euphrates, Özal visited Damascus and found a deal with President Hafiz al-Assad, but then disagreement arose over the minimum average flow supplied to Syria, which linked with the continuous Syrian support for PKK, caused the worsening of relations between the two countries.[77]

The Gulf War: Strategic Recognition, Domestic Costs

When the Gulf War erupted, Turkey responded in line with its traditional cautious approach, viewing the crisis as a dispute between two Arab States and advocating for the maintenance of the status quo[78]. However, Özal subsequently diverged from this view, and interpreted the crisis as a strategic opportunity to demonstrate Turkey's value to the Western security architecture, particularly to the United States. In Özal's view, a clear alignment with the US-led coalition was essential both to affirm Turkey's geopolitical relevance but also to possible profit of post-war territorial restructuring, which may include the Northern oil-rich regions of Iraq.[79]

Özal acted decisively and unilaterally, bypassing the more hesitant Turkish parliament and government to engage in secret communications with the White House, and also by exerting public pressure to manipulate parliamentary opinion in favor of supporting the Western alliance. On 8

[75] Syria gave shelter to Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, as well as logistical and training support to his organization.

[76] Greece and Greek Cyprus, also tried to join the dispute establishing an anti-Turkish bloc with Syria and other countries. Terrorist groups such as PKK took advantage of the situation to further weaken and destabilize Turkish oriental provinces.

[77] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195.

[78] See also Rutherford Living History. (2016, August 1). *Living History presents Turgut Özal* [Video]. YouTube.

[79] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p .9-15, 16, 20

August 1990, Turkey cut the Iraq-Turkey oil pipelines which moved 1.52 million barrels of oil per day. The parliament subsequently approved the deployment of troops to the Gulf, marking a substantial departure from Kemalist non-interventionism. However, this assertive foreign policy had significant domestic backlash and high-profile resignations followed: including those of Foreign Minister Ali Bozer on 12 October, Defense Minister Sefa Giray on 18 December, and ultimately Chief of the General Staff Necip Torumtay, who viewed Özal's actions as misaligned with Turkey's security interest.[80]

This latter also demonstrated the civilian character of the regime, the loss of the military grip over it, and highlighted Özal's dominance in foreign policy, a key difference from earlier leaders like Menderes or Demirel. Ultimately, Turkey refrained from participating directly in military combat but provided logistical support by granting the United States access to military bases such as İncirlik in Adana. The military success of the coalition improved Özal stature in Western capitals, particularly in Washington, which granted Ankara new trade benefits and security assistance, and emphasized its strategic significance in the Middle East.[81]

The United States raised military and economic aid for 1991 by $282 million, doubled the Turkish textile exports quota, and diplomatically encouraged its partners, to ease Tukey economic sacrifices[82]. However, the war also generated new challenges: the failure of Kurdish resistance against Saddam Hussein triggered a humanitarian crisis, with around 700,000 Kurdish refugees entering Turkish territory, which along with the power vacuum in northern Iraq allowed the PKK to establish a stronghold under the supervision of the allied forces, in the framework of the *Provide Comfort operation*[83], but also intensified cross-border insurgent activity, ethnic consciousness among Kurds in Turkey, and destabilized southeastern Turkey. Moreover, Özal's best-case scenario which envisaged the removal of Saddam Hussein was disattended and turned in a retaliation by the dictator which allegedly started to supply the PKK because of Turkey's cooperation with allied forces. Lastly, Turkey economically suffered from the loss of Iraq as trade

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] On a bilateral level, Egypt was encouraged to purchase 40 Turkish-produced F-16 jets, and European Community to increase Turkey's textile quota. Moreover, on a multilateral level, the U.S. favored the mobilization of $4 billion in aid to Turkey through the *Gulf Crisis Financial Coordinating Group*.

[83] A "safe haven" was created in Northern Iraq to face the humanitarian emergency that thousands of Kurdish refugees were experiencing. Ultimately, this establishment allowed Kurdish political factions to consolidate and exercise effective autonomy in that area.

partner, the broader economic losses were estimated between $5 and $7 billion, and despite Ankara's requests and U.S. mobilization, Western financial compensation was limited.[84]

1.3 Turning East: Post-Soviet Space and the Turkish Identity Revival

Before 1989, Turkey had no formal relations with the Turkic republics of the Soviet Union, despite shared linguistic, cultural, and religious ties. This distance was the result of Kemalist isolationism and Cold War dynamics, which discouraged any Pan-Turkist approach. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union offered new possibilities.[85]

Five newly independent Turkic states emerged: Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan which joined Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Contrary to Kemalism which traditionally rejected Pan-Turkism, Özal quickly recognized these new states and to promote engagement[86]. To operationalize this vision, Özal launched a comprehensive set of policies designed to foster economic, educational, and cultural integration: he created dedicated structures within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and established the *Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency* (TİKA), a largely funded institutions, envisioned as a mean of Turkey's development diplomacy; moreover, Turkey offered approximately 10,000 scholarships to students from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and promoted the sending of Turkish students and experts abroad; also the media played a critical role, with the state broadcaster TRT launching *Avrasya* (Eurasia) to reach audiences in the Turkic world, that was soon followed by private networks; at the economic level, Turkey extended around $7 billions in development credits through institutions like *Eximbank* to facilitate infrastructure and business projects; State-owned Turkish Airlines established regular flights to Turkic major cities; and finally the government also

[84] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 177-181, 196-200; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 123-127; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p .9-15, 16, 20

[85] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 191-193, 195-196; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 121-122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 15-16

[86] Nonetheless, he deliberately chose not to establish a formal Turkish Commonwealth or any political engagement to avoid provoking Russia, Iran, or other regional powers. See also Organization of Islamic Cooperation. *Report and Resolutions of the Seventh Session of the COMCEC (Istanbul, 6–9 October 1991).* Istanbul: COMCEC, 1991, p.102

encouraged Turkish business and religious groups to invest in the region, particularly in sectors such as media, education, telecommunication, and textiles[87].

The public discourse in Turkey also shifted and for the first time in Republican history the term "brother republics" entered common usage. Despite initial resistance from leftist-Kemalist factions, who accused Özal of advancing American interests and endangering relations with Russia, opposition remained marginal. And the enthusiastic reception that Özal received during his Central Asian visits and the launch of annual Turkic Summits witnessed the broad regional support for his approach.[88]

Turkey's renewed interest extended beyond the five republics and included Turkic minorities in Russia (e.g., Crimean Tatars, Kazan Turks), Uyghurs in China, and Gagauz Turks in Moldova through economic and cultural diplomacy, being careful not to provoke the host countries. Overall, Özal's Turkic policy marked a historic shift: it ended Turkey's diplomatic and cultural isolation, offered a new regional identity beyond Europe or the Arab-Muslim world, and transformed Turkey's foreign policy into a more proactive and multi-dimensional "Turkist" orientation, distancing itself from earlier Kemalist principles.[89]

Historically, Russia had been perceived as the greatest threat to Turkish security, and the strengthening of relationships with the United States in the early 1980s[90] was inevitably coupled with growing tensions between Ankara and Moscow. The Soviet engagement in Afghanistan was criticized in Turkey[91], likewise the signature of the DECA in 1980 was blamed by the Soviet press.[92]

The strained relations with the USSR continued until 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded Konstantin Chernenko, and the Soviet Union reoriented its foreign policy towards a more cooperative approach with the West and Turkey causing, in the second half of the 1980s an

---

[87] Among the private actors, the *Nurcu*_religious movement led by Fethullah Gülen was particularly influential, establishing media outlets and schools, and the *Zaman* newspaper became one of the most circulated publications in countries like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

[88] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 191-193, 195-196; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 121-122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195; Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 15-16

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] See supra, paragraph 1.2

[91] and some of Afghan mujaheddins of Turkic extraction were given shelter in Turkey.

[92] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 191-193, 195-196; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 121-122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195

easing of the relationships. Indeed, under Özal's leadership, Turkish-Russian relations underwent a notable redefinition and now were guided more by economic pragmatism instead of ideological confrontation. Russia remained a potential rival, and indeed it was particularly wary of Ankara's increasing engagement with Turkic populations in Central Asia and within the Russian Federation but Özal, recognizing the possible antagonism, attentively avoided any provocation, and mainly orientated his interest towards the exports and investment possibilities in Russia instead of political issues. Between 1987 and 1990, the bilateral trade volume between Turkey and the USSR raised from $476 million to $1.8 billion.[93]

The 11 March 1991 Özal's visit to Moscow, accompanied by Turkish businessmen and high-ranking officials, marked a clear turning point. It resulted in a *Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborhood and Cooperation*, along with several economic agreements. This marked a conceptual departure from Cold War-era bilateralism determining a significant expansion of Turkish credits to Russia: the Eximbank grew its support to $400 million and a further $200 million were allocated for Russian imports from Turkey. Bilateral trade rapidly intensified, reaching $2.5 billion by 1991 and reached $5 billion in the following years, making the Russian Federation the second biggest economic partner of Turkey[94]. The Russia-Turkey natural gas pipeline project symbolized this new economic interdependence and by 1993, Turkish construction companies had undertaken over $2 billion worth projects in Russia, which included also prestigious sites such as hospitals, hotels, and government buildings. This economic engagement reduced bilateral tensions and encouraged both states to pursue more cooperative relations. In this way, Russia, previously perceived as a major threat, became a key market and economic partner for Turkey by the end of the Özal's era.[95]

Parallel to these bilateral and regional initiatives, Özal also fostered the creation of the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC) in 1990, whose main goals were to stabilize the region through economic cooperation a to create new export markets for Turkish enterprises, and the proposal was met with enthusiasm by countries in the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and the Balkans[96]. Since many participating countries had unresolved political disputes with each other –

---

[93] *Ibid.*

[94] Besides the official channels, a parallel informal network, with millions of Russians engaging in cross-border commerce in Turkish cities, contributed billions to the bilateral economic exchange outside formal accounting.

[95] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 191-193, 195-196; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 121-122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War* p. 184-195.

[96] Key participants included Russia, Greece, and Ukraine.

such as Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia and Ukraine, or Turkey itself and Greece - Özal deliberately avoided focusing on political matters to not hamper the organization's progress and focused on the economic potential of the initiative.[97]

The cultural dimension of the BSEC had a relevant aspect too, and agreements concerning education, language, science, and the arts were signed[98]. Countries like Ukraine and Bulgaria increasingly viewed Turkey as a key partner, and for some, such as Albania, Turkey also served as both a source of financial support and a political counterweight to traditional regional rivals, such as Greece. Following its establishment, trade between Turkey and other BSEC member states increased significantly, and the Black Sea started emerging as a newly defined political and economic space, with Ankara having a prominent role within.[99]

1.4 Between Aspiration and Reality: Turkey and the European Community

Despite Özal's commitment to liberalization and reform, the European Community (EC) remained highly critical of Turkey's political climate immediately after the 1980 Coup and during the Evren's Presidency, refusing to fully normalize diplomatic relations. The European public opinion now was more sensible to the protection of democratic principles and, notwithstanding the modernist and Western motive of the military rulers, the authoritarian mechanisms of the new government was at odds with Western Europe's engagement to democratic standards[100]. It is symbolical the decision taken by the *Turkey-EC Association Council* in May 1981, on a draft package of economic aid to Turkey, which conditioned the release of funds to effective moves to restore democracy. A situation furtherly complicated by the advocacy and negative portrayal of the Turkish state made by Turkish political exiles and deportees living in Western Europe. Moreover,

[97] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195;* Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 14-16

[98] As part of these initiatives, some countries began sending their military officers and civil servants to Turkey for training and education, often funded by Turkish government scholarships.

[99] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 184-189; Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy, p. 105, 119-120, 135; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War, p. 184-195;* Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 14-16

[100] Although the 1983 election was considered a sensible development for democracy, EC policy was biased by the previous military rule. See Çalış, p. 184-195

the Greek factor played a key role in this regard. Greece's joining of the EC as its tenth member in 1981 gave Athens a political leverage that was used to boycott Turkish interests.[101]

Nevertheless, one of the most significant foreign policy initiatives of Özal's first phase addressed Turkey's relations with the European Community, consisting in the *Turkey's application for full membership in the European Community* the 14 April 1987. Having been an associate member of the EC since 1963, Özal now viewed EC integration as a natural culmination of Turkey's path toward liberal democracy and market economy. Özal's decision was also grounded in growing economic ties. Indeed, in 1990, EC member states accounted for 53% of Turkish exports. Similarly, European countries accounted for 37% of Turkish imports. Despite these statistics, the EC's response to Turkey's application was tepid. The European Commission took thirty months to issue its Opinion (December 1989), and the Council of Ministers endorsed it only in February 1990[102].

The Commission Opinion on Turkey (1989)

The Commission Opinion gathered in its introduction "all the information and documentation needed to assess the consequences and implication of Turkish accession", "to pursue its reflections on Turkey's application […] in the broader context of actual or potential applications in respect of which the Community must adopt an overall strategy", and the results could not avoid taking into consideration the "structure and development of Turkish economy" and an "examination of the political situation in Turkey" as constituency basis for the Opinion[103].

The Commission Report referred to the consequences of the *Single European Act* (SEA), which was signed in 1986 and adopted in 1987, and that laid the groundwork for a deepening of political and economic integration, setting higher standards for candidate countries and "increased rights and obligations […] to the status of Member States". Indeed, the Report referred to the entrance "into a new stage" of the Community development, whose objectives were very ambitious since this stage "will make it possible to achieve European union". First and foremost, the

[101] Özal, T. (1991). *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Revised English ed.). K. Rustem & Brother. p. 301

[102] *Ibid.*

[103] Commission of the European Communities. (1989, December 20). *Commission opinion on Turkey's request for accession to the Community* (SEC(89) 2290 final)

objectives included the completion of the *single market* and of the monetary union, accompanied by political union according to a Commission self-imposed diktat which aimed at "reducing tensions and divisions in Europe", from which derived a sensitive caution to avoid the make "unwise" and "any premature" steps with regard the candidate countries, and envisaging not to be involved in "new accession negotiations before 1993", although this did not mean that " our partners must abandon their aim of accession and would offer them the possibility of entering into a new stage [of] closer association [with] the Community"[104].

In the second part of the Report were described two key Turkey's aspects that caused concerns to the Commission: the size of the country and related size of population, which would have been "bigger than any Community Member States", and the general lower level of development compared to the European average, which may cause an "additional budgetary burden […] resulting from the inclusion of Turkey in the structural funds". In fact, "Turkey's economic and political situation, as far as the Commission can evaluate in the last quarter of 1989" were not considered able to overcome, "in the medium term", the difficulties determined by the "adjustment problems" connected to the accession to the Community[105].

From an economic point of view, positive recent developments were acknowledged, such as the "remarkable leap forward" since 1980 of the Turkish economy: the GDP and export increases; an improvement in economic infrastructure; and the general economic policy oriented towards modernity and international economy integration[106]. Although, four major still existing limits were pointed out: "very major structural disparities, in both agriculture and industry"; "macro-economic imbalances"; "high levels of industrial protectionism" higher than the provisions of the *Ankara Agreement* (the Association Agreement of 1963); and "a low level of social protection". Then, the lower Turkish purchasing power compared to the Community average was highlighted, and the rapid population growth and its negative impact on an already struggling employment rate.[107] From a political point of view, the parliamentary democracy resulting from the 1980 military coup was positively acknowledged, although "the weight of legislation" and its closeness to the whole range of political forces and trade unions were not. Furtherly, "human rights situation and [the] respect for the identity of minorities" were considered insufficient for a

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] *Ibid.*

[107] *Ibid.*

democracy[108]. And, lastly, the disputes "between Turkey and one Member State of the Community", and the "situation in Cyprus", causes of expressed concerns, were inevitably and negatively evaluated.[109]

In the conclusive part of the Opinion, the Commission expressed its willingness to "pursue its cooperation with Turkey" and that is a fundamental interest to help Turkey to complete its modernization processes, also by recommending "a series of substantial measures [which] would enable [further] interdependence and integration". The measures included: completion of the customs union; the intensification of financial cooperation; the promotion of industrial and technological cooperation; and the strengthening of political and cultural links. "Progressive completion of the Customs union will give the Community to associate Turkey more closely with the operation of the single market".[110]

Özal's Counterarguments: Identity, Economics, and Security

While official reasons referred to Turkey's economic development gap and political problem, such as human rights issues and the dispute with Greece, cannot be underestimated the cultural Western bias against Turkey's Muslim identity which was the main Özal's counterargument. Özal was well aware of the reasons backing the skepticism about Turkey's membership, and its Islamic identity, in a predominantly Christian European Community and in a 1991 issue he, interestingly, exposed his point of view on this topic.[111]

He emphasized that "all religions teach mankind to be good and to do good", describing the three monotheistic faiths as "sisters". He argued that religious diversity is not incompatible with shared spiritual values and that "higher religions are [just] variations on a single theme".[112]

---

[108] This was consistent with the precedent of Spain whose application, first submitted in 1977, was addressed seriously by Brussels only after the end of Franco's authoritarian regime and the begin of the democratic transition, which culminated in the 1978 Constitution. See Moreno Juste, A., & Blanco Sío-López, C. (2016). *Spain and the European integration process, 1945–2010*. CVCE – Centre for European Studies.

[109] Commission of the European Communities. (1989, December 20). *Commission opinion on Turkey's request for accession to the Community* (SEC(89) 2290 final)

[110] *Ibid.*

[111] Özal, T. (1991). *Turkey in Europe*. p. 283, 289 – 291, 304, 312 – 315.

[112] *Ibid.*

Furtherly, reflecting on Turkey's secularism, he noted its historical hallmarks: unlike the West, where secularism emerged from a rationalist movement seeking to separate church and state, in Turkey it was a response to the Ottoman Empire's decline and aimed at restraining religious conservatism within a disintegrating order, so that "secularism in Turkey has therefore been much more condensed in time, and radical in nature and scope"; moreover, Turkish Islam, is rooted in the *Hanafite* legal tradition, which is notably flexible and open to consensus, and gave "Turkish society a different outlook from that of other Islamic societies"; lastly, he pointed out that Sunni Islam lacks a formal priesthood, and in the Ottoman system, the Sultan held ultimate authority over religious figures, allowing the introduction and the predominance of secular laws alongside Sharia norms. Seeing this blend as a unique heritage which made Turkey not alien to Europe but rather its "complementary identity" or "alter ego".[113]

He also acknowledged Turkey's possible demographic pressure "since the proportion of young people is much higher in our country than in Western Europe" and the economic delay, due to a lower per capita income, as understandable causes of EC's negative answer, but also stressed that economic parity with Europe was foreseeable: "Our national per capita income will be around $4,500 by the end of 1990", and could reach the European average by 2000 if growth rates remained steady, he predicted. And, far from being a burden, Turkey would represent "a vast market for high technology products" and an attractive destination for European investments. Turkey, he suggested, could serve Europe as the "sun-belt" had served the United States offering competitive labor, stimulating bilateral employment, and encouraging industrial expansions.[114]

To conclude the references to his work, Özal also went beyond economics, and insisted on Turkey's indispensable role in European security. As a NATO member for over three decades, Turkey had proven its commitment to the Western alliance, and given Europe's vital interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Gulf - which are areas rich in energy and strategically important for trade and political stability – Turkey's geopolitical position was essential. Dynamics which were "reaffirming for the first time since the Roman Empire the complementary nature of the north and south of the Mediterranean".[115]

The Gulf War granted Turkey a better stature in Western capitals, where its active support for the U.S.-led coalition was widely acknowledged as proof of Ankara's reliability within the

[113] *Ibid.*

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] *Ibid.*

Western security system. Yet, this recognition did not immediately translate into a more favorable attitude towards Turkey's EC membership. This episode revealed the limits of Europe's willingness to recognize Turkey's position with the European Community and anticipated the frustrations and the turbulent path of the Turkey-EU relation in the 1990s.[116]

1.6 Cyprus and the Aegean: The Return of Hard Borders

Özal inherited unresolved tensions from his predecessors, particularly over Cyprus and the Aegean Sea, which sought to resolve by pursuing a more conciliatory and economically pragmatic approach.

The Cyprus issue remained a major obstacle in Turkish-Western relations during the Özal era. Although the 1974 Turkish military intervention was presented as necessary to protect the Turkish Cypriot community from violence, it generated tensions with the Western partners. Unlike the military leadership that had dominated Turkish politics following the 1980 coup, Özal opposed the creation of an independent Turkish Cypriot state and instead supported a federal solution.[117] This latter - which had already been endorsed in the *1977 and 1979 UN High-Level Agreements* between Greek Cypriot leaders, the *Archbishop Makarios III* and *Spyros Kyprianou*, and Turkish Cypriot leader *Rauf Denktaş* – envisaged Cyprus as "independent, non-aligned, sovereign, bi-zonal Greco-Turkish (Cypriot) Federal Republic composed of two Federated States on in the North for the Turkish national community and one in the South for the Greek national community" and "the sovereignty shall continue to be shared equally by the two national communities as co-founders of the Republic"[118].

Nevertheless, in his first mandate (before being elected as Prime Minister) lacked the political leverage to prevent the unilateral declaration of independence by the *Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus* (TRNC) on 15 November 1983. The TRNC's declaration caused immediate condemnation from the United States, which refused recognition and immediately pressured other

[116] Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), p. 19

[117] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 194-195; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War*, p. 184-195.

[118] United Nations Secretary-General. (1977, April 30). *Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of Security Council resolution 401 (1976)* (S/12323). United Nations Security Council.

Muslim and allied countries to follow suit.[119] Between 1984 and 1986, the U.S. administration pushed Turkey to uphold a federal compromise solution with the TRNC, even by sending a personal letter from the President Ronald Reagan to Turkish President Kenan Evren in November 1984. Although Turkey accepted the UN-backed proposals in both January 1985 and March 1986, which envisaged a federal republic with a Greek Cypriot President and a Turkish Cypriot Vice-President, Greece and the Greek Cypriot administration rejected them. Despite this, the U.S. pressure continued targeting Ankara, also because of the influence exerted by the Greek lobby in the Congress, that ultimately strained Turkish-American relations. Both sides were intransigents on their positions hindering any possible solution: Greek Cypriots aimed to dominate the whole island, while Turkish Cypriots insisted on their own independent sovereignty.[120]

Özal attempts to promote a settlement provoked criticism domestically. Even within his own party, figures such as Mesut Yılmaz opposed him, and sections of the Turkish press accused him of betraying national interests. Özal's attempt to promote a solution continued until the end of 1991 when Süleyman Demirel became Prime Minister making his influence waning. Despite his significant diplomatic effort, he was unable to overcome the deadlock during either his premiership or presidency, sometimes hampering relations with Greece, the United States, and the broader European Community[121], where the Cyprus question was frequently exploited by anti-Turkey actors. This question really spoiled Turkey's image in the world in the critical moment of the ending of the Cold War[122]. Subsequent Turkish governments were less inclined to pressure the Turkish Cypriot President Rauf Denktaş toward compromise.[123]

Bilateral relations disputes between Turkey and Greece, during Özal's era, and the Aegean disputes over the limits of territorial waters remained unsettled. At the beginning of his term as Prime Minister, he tried to ease the tense relations with Greece by lifting the visa requirements for Greek visitors to Turkey and withdrawing a small number of troops from Cyprus, but immediately

---

[119] Goshko, J. M. (1983, November 22). *Turk warned on backing Cypriot move; administration says Congress might impose tough aid restrictions*. *The Washington Post*.

[120] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 194-195; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War*, p. 184-195.

[121] Particularly after Greece joined the EC in 1981. In the 1980s it became evident that Greece won the goodwill of the Community, leaving Turkey with any possibility but appeasing Greece to have a chance to join the EC.

[122] Cyprus question was very costly economically for Turkey since the 1960s. Indeed, only during Özal's era the US cut a third of all financial aid to Turkey, and the EC did not put into effect the Fourth Financial Protocol. See supra paragraphs 1.2 and 1.5.

[123] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 194-195; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War*, p. 184-195.

in March 1984 relations strained again because of a military confrontation in the Aegean Sea. Then again in March 1987, when a Canadian-controlled oil company involved in the Thasos oil find announced plans to drill in water located outside Greek territorial waters and claimed by Turkey. As a consequence, Turkey dispatched its own research vessel *Sismik I* into the same waters, prompting a Greek military alert[124]. The crisis was defused after conciliatory declarations by Özal[125], that paved the way for a subsequent confidential dialogue with Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou at the Davos economic conference in January 1988. This meeting led to an agreement aimed at reducing bilateral tensions and preventing any similar incidents, also by establishing a hot line between Ankara and Athens. Moreover, the Turkish government repealed the Turkish Degree of 1964 which restricted the property right of Greek property owner in Istanbul, the Greek government lifted its objection to favor Turkey's association talks with the EC, and in June 1988, Özal made the first official visit by a Turkish premier to Athens after 36 years.[126]

However, the so called *spirit of Davos* failed to resolve the core disputes between the two countries, and by the closing of Özal's experience, Greek-Turkish relations had come back to the usual mistrusting track. It could be said that the more Özal tried to mend fences with Greece, the more the Greek leader Andreas Papandreou was not collaborative. Indeed, Athens never gave up its negative attitude towards Turkey in international organizations and kept using these last as a mean of pressuring Turkey about both Aegean and Cyprus questions.[127]

1.7 Özal's Legacy and the Opening of a New Diplomatic Era

The final phase of Özal political influence was marked by a context of shifting domestic dynamics and growing political competition. In June 1991, Mesut Yılmaz's election as new leader of the MP, marked a significant transition within the party from the more conservative-nationalist elements toward a more secular and liberal majority. The parliamentary election of October 1991

[124] New York Times. (1987, March 29). *[Greeks and Turks ease Aegean Crisis]*. The New York Times, p. 16

[125] Özal declared that the Sismik I would not sail into disputed water as long as Greeks had not proceeded with new drilling operations.

[126] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 194-195; Hale, W (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy, p. 122; Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War*, p. 184-195; Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), 10-12

[127] *Ibid.*

confirmed this trend: Süleyman Demirel's *Doğru Yol Partisi* (True Path Party, TPP) won with 27% of the vote, while Yılmaz's MP followed with 24%, and the *Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti* (The Social Democrat Populist Party, SDPP), which had opposed Özal's Gulf War policy, arrived third with 20.8%. This electoral result marked the political end of Özal's era, as his direct influence over government and parliament diminished. However, he continued challenging the traditional foreign policy doctrine as too cautious, isolationist, and ineffective but this time the capacity to affect the government and parliament was limited. That is why he planned to return to active politics as a party leader to further being able to implement his foreign policy understanding along with a new sympathetic and tolerant position towards Kurdish groups.

On this last point Özal declared that he had never been in conflict with the Kurdish people. Rather he believed that any significant change affecting Kurdish communities across the region, which included Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, and the Soviet Union would inevitably impact the broader geopolitical stability. He argued that given the interconnected nature of the area, altering borders would be nearly impossible and lacked the consent of any of the states involved creating chaos, and for this reason derived the need to halt insurgent movements. The most viable solution for the Kurds, he sustained, was to remain citizens of their respective countries while seeking equal treatment and, where possible, some degree of autonomy.[128]

In the case of Turkey, Özal emphasized that Kurds had never been regarded as a minority, but rather as an integral part of the nation[129]. The only rupture, began in 1984 with the rise of the PKK, to whom Turkey responded forcefully. Which then did not impede to provide humanitarian support and shelter for those fleeing Saddam chemical attack in 1988.[130] However, Özal's death in April 1993 brought about a dramatic end to these ambitions and to the last challenge to the Republican foreign policy.[131]

He was persuaded that the economic liberalization reforms he introduced had begun to transform Turkish society, creating a new generation more receptive to free-market principles and

[128] Rutherford Living History. (2016, August 1). *Living History presents Turgut Özal* [Video]. YouTube.

[129] He pointed to the presence of Kurdish-origin ministers, members of parliament, generals, judges, and affluent individuals as evidence of their integration.

[130] Rutherford Living History. (2016, August 1). *Living History presents Turgut Özal* [Video]. YouTube.

[131] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 200

less dependent on the traditional paternalistic role of the Kemalist state. A shift already visible both in politics and media.[132]

He was critic about the status quo as was conceived by İsmet İnönü, which promoted risk aversion and isolation in foreign policy, and that only the willingness to take calculated risks may lead to achieve meaningful gains. And from this the need to play a model role for other Muslim countries, but also Eastern European and post-Soviet states, offering a secular, democratic and free-market based identity.[133]

With premonition he already envisaged Turkey being able to offer an alternative to religious fundamentalism, and people to embrace the Jihad, that he considered a potential future threat, particularly to Christian populations. He believed that "The rapid and radical changes taking place on the world economic and political scene [require] efficient cooperation, and solidarity within the Islamic world. [And] economic cooperation [...] will contribute to the welfare of our countries, but also to the achievement of durable peace and stability in our region as well as in the world".[134] Ultimately, Özal staunchly argued that Turkey was already a Western country, although its population was 98% Muslim, and ready to play a bridging role between the Islamic world and the West[135].

To conclude, the Özalism could be seen as an ideological synthesis of Liberalism, Turkism, Islamism, and Ottomanism which marked a decisive departure from the Kemalist Republican orthodoxy. Whereas Kemalist foreign policy had traditionally been isolationist, pro-Western, and hostile to pan-Turkist or Islamist oriented, Özal – taking advantage of internal structural changes such as economic liberalization, urbanization, the spread of economic welfare, and the strengthening of Islamic and national identities; and international developments, notably the end of the Cold War, which caused the opening of the possibility to entrench new economic and cultural ties with regions formerly belonging to the Ottoman empire, and Europe's reluctance to integrate Turkey – redefined Turkey's geopolitical orientation and priorities by moving Turkey's from a stricter Western focus to a broader regional interest, with the aspiration to become a regional power.[136]

---

[132] *Ibid.*

[133] *Ibid.*

[134] Istanbul: COMCEC, 1991, p. 191-192

[135] Rutherford Living History. (2016, August 1). *Living History presents Turgut Özal* [Video]. YouTube.

[136] Koru, S. (2011). Özalism. p. 204-205

Chapter 2 – The 1990s: Strategic Stagnation or Transition?

This chapter addresses the evolution of Turkish foreign policy during the 1990s. A decade defined both by the international reconfiguration brough about by the End of the Cold war, and by domestic political instability combined with shifting regional dynamics.

It opens by describing Turkey within the new international context that followed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, then it periodizes the decade through the succession of governments. This approach makes it possible to highlight the constant interaction between the domestic and the international level: coalition politics, military influence, and ideological divisions directly influenced the country's responses to the new post-Soviet environment and regional crises.

The chapter then analyzes Turkey's engagement in key regional theaters: the Balkans - with a focus on Greek-Turkish relations and the Cyprus issue – the Caucasus and Central Asia. Highlighting how Ankara balanced ethnic solidarity, security concerns, and geopolitical ambitions.

Subsequently, are considered Turkey's relations with the United States. Marked by cooperation and recurring frictions. And the tumultuous path towards deeper integration with the European Union, from the Customs Union to the granting of candidate status.

Finally, the chapter tries to assess whether this period represented a phase of strategic stagnation caused by internal fragility, or rather a transitional stage that prepared the ground for the more assertive foreign policy of the 2000s.

2.1 Introduction: The Domestic and International Context of Turkish Foreign Policy, 1990–2002

The end of the Cold War had such repercussions that demanded every state, no matter of its size, to readapt to the new international reality throughout the 1990s. Notably, the dissolution of the USSR had a dramatic effect on the Eastern Europe and Central Asia landscape which immediately were afflicted by ethnical and national conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus.

These shifts affected Turkey's foreign policy environment because of many crises in its proximity, brought about a fundamental reshaping of global regional power equilibrium, offering new opportunities for regional influence, but also introducing new risks and challenges. As a consequence, during the 1990s, and drawing on the new attitude inspired by Özal, Ankara adopted a more proactive stance in front of the new realities - also making great effort to avoid unilateral actions and rather fostering diplomatically international organizations, such as UN and NATO, engagement - that ultimately led Turkey to transform its peripheral role in the international community into a more central one. In particular, in some cases it demonstrated more assertiveness facing crises in Middle East and, in some others, it kept the traditional republican caution and moderation, even if internal public opinion called for stronger military support to Muslim and Turkic populations as it was for the Balkans and Caucasus conflicts.[137]

A key element that prompted Turkey's more assertive foreign policy was undeniably the dissolution of the USSR and the redefinition of its borders. Tukey had not anymore, a direct frontier with the Soviet Union, and shared its borders with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, relieving Ankara from the fear of a Soviet invasion. In this new context, Turkey's relative power increased, not necessarily because of domestic development but mostly because of the weakening of the neighbors since to the East, new Caucasian republics replaced the USSR, to the south Syria and Iraq lost Soviet backing. In the North, Ukraine substituted the Soviet presence across the Black Sea, and Bulgaria saw the collapse of the Jivkov regime, placing Turkey in a position of relative strength across a wide geopolitical area. However, this behavior reflected also a grown concern among Turkish decision-makers about the country's declining geostrategic relevance to its Western partners, since the end of the Soviet threat reduced the security relevance of Turkey's influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly in light of the European Union's persistent hesitation over Turkey's full membership.[138]

Indeed, EU full membership still consisted in one of the primary Turkish foreign policy goals but the ending of the Cold War affected also Turkey's relations with the European Union. The collapse of the Cold War order and the ending of the East-West confrontation alleviated many of Western Europe's core security concerns, and as a consequence reducing the Turkey's strategic

---

[137] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era: The challenges of multi-regionalism. *Journal of International Affairs*, *54*(1), p. 169-170; 179-182; Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham]. University of Birmingham eTheses Repository, p. 121, 124, 127-128, 130-131; Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy since 1774* (3rd ed.). Routledge, p. 135

[138] *Ibid*.

importance against Communism for the West itself. A strategic relevance that was rather replaced by the new countries from the former Eastern Bloc, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Baltic Republics, which expressed aspirations to join the EU[139], and were more suitable to create a potential buffer zone between Western Europe and post-Soviet Russia.[140]

However, the 1990s are mostly widely recognized as a decade marked by limited domestic political stability in Turkey due to the frequent succession of short-lived government coalitions and recurrent elections, that was the "Achilles' heel" of Turkish foreign policy[141]. In this period, systemic and international factors had probably more influence on Turkish foreign policy decisions rather than governmental political decisions. Indeed, the inability of politically fragile governments to effectively respond to the initial challenges posed by the post-Cold War environment turned domestically in a constant conflict between civilian authorities and the military. This latter ended up occupying the void left in foreign policy by weak executive leaderships and approached it primarily through the lens of national security concerns.[142]

Between 1990 and 2002, Turkey experienced significant political instability. Through the three general elections held in 1991, 1995, and 1999, eleven different governments succeeded one another, seven of which were coalitions led by seven different Prime Ministers, and which saw fourteen different Ministers of Foreign Affairs taking office. The only majority government during this period was that of the Özal's *Anavatan Partisi* (Motherland Party, MP) which came to power prior to the end of the Cold War, in 1989. However, in November 1991, it was replaced by a coalition government formed by the *Doğru Yol Partisi* (True Path Party, TPP) and the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party, RPP). This marked the beginning of a prolonged era of coalition politics in Turkey which lasted until 2002, and where the only majority government ruled for less than two years.[143]

Demirel–İnönü Coalition (1991–1993): Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis and Cautious Diplomacy

[139] See paragraph 2.6

[140] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 133-134

[141] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 136

[142] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 113-114

[143] *Ivi*, p. 148-149

The first government that was aware of the end of the bipolar world was the one presided by Ahmet Mesut Yılmaz. The new Prime Minister, who substituted Yıldırım Akbulut in June 1991, was still an extraction of the Motherland Party, and in its program was foreseen the necessity for Turkey, being a country not exclusively European, but belonging to the broader Mediterranean, Black Sea, Balkans, and Middle East area, to assume pro-active and multidimensional foreign policy. However, because of divergences within the party, notably with president Özal, this government was not able to conduct an effective foreign policy. When in November 1991 he called for a new parliamentary election aiming to renovate the electorate's support, his party lost the majority and moved to the opposition.[144]

It was followed by the first coalition government which was formed by the center-right *Doğru Yol Partisi* (True Path Party, TPP) and the center-left *Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti* (Social Democrat Populist Party, SDPP) under the Minister of TPP's Süleyman Demirel, with Erdal Inönü from the SDPP as deputy, on 20 November 1991. MP came in second and, although there was no great difference in terms of party programme with TPP, which won the elections, the rivalry between Özal and Demirel, led this latter to form a coalition with the social democrats. The loss of the parliamentary majority signed the end of President Özal's capacity to exert predominant control over foreign policy and the beginning of the struggles on decision-making processes. Indeed, within this coalition began the discussion about which attitude Turkey should adopt in foreign policy.[145]

The debate stemmed from the beginning of a series of transformative events. First, it is relevant to consider the shift in political leadership which introduced figures who were more sensible to change and believed that Turkey needed courageously move beyond its traditional status quo-oriented foreign policy[146]. Thus, a shift aiming not only to ensure national security and economic prosperity but also capitalizing on the new opportunities of the post-Cold War context. Both President Özal and Prime Minister Demirel were willing to implement a more active foreign policy. However, the conflict arose when it came to discuss the degree of this activism since Özal leaned towards a more radical view, while Demirel preferred a more cautious approach.

[144] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 155

[145] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 155-156; Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p,* 139

[146] the debates were often centered around the dichotomy of terms such as passive versus active, careful versus unhesitant, static versus dynamic, and responsible versus adventurous

Nevertheless, within the government coalition the TPP and the SDPP, despite the ideological divergence, were able to cooperate harmoniously in foreign policy.[147]

One of the major issues they had to face was the outbreak of ethnic and separatist conflicts in the Caucasus[148] which triggered significant concerns in Turkey regarding regional stability and energy security[149]. These crises developed in areas geographically very proximate to Turkey and involved Turkic and other Muslim populations with which Ankara had strong historical and cultural bonds. Notably, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh had great resonance within the government coalition.[150]

Indeed, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, both Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence and Turkey, favoring its ethno-cultural ties with Azerbaijan, recognized it before the other post-Soviet republics. However, the conflict, which had begun as a territorial dispute in 1988, immediately escalated into a full-scale war after independence in 1991. During the war, Armenian forces, with Soviet support, occupied the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which amounted to roughly 20% of Azerbaijan's territory and home to a predominantly Azeri population. Consistent with the traditional foreign policy principle of respecting territorial integrity and state sovereignty[151], Turkey was the sole country which aligned with Azerbaijan. In contrast, the United States leaned towards Armenia, and Russia openly supported this latter. However, as the war progressed and reports of massacres committed by Armenians against Azeri civilians emerged, mass protests arose across Turkey to denounce Armenian actions[152]. Here is when divergences between Özal and Demirel emerged. Indeed, Özal pushed for a more assertive, pro-Azeri stance even hinting at the possibility of a limited Turkish military intervention to balance Russian support to Armenia. He believed that Turkey must "show its teeth"[153] and that there was the "need to scare Armenians a

[147] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 155-156; Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p,* 139

[148] Besides the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis that will be soon described, also Georgia experienced civil war between 1991-1993, and Chechnya, whose conflict deflagrated in 1994 lasted until 2009.

[149] See paragraph 2.4

[150] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era p. 175

[151] See Chapter 1

[152] Within Turkey lived considerable communities of Caucasus people such as Azeris, Abkhazians, Chechens, who intensively lobbied to pressure Ankara to adopt more assertive policies in favor of their kin.

[153] Pope, H. (1993, April 6). *Turkey "must show its teeth" to Armenia: Military help for Azerbaijan urged*. *The Independent*.

little bit, [because] the world only understands threats"[154]. Demirel, on the other hand, adopted a more restrained approach, holding that lacked a legitimate legal framework for Turkish military involvement. That Özal's remarks were "completely irresponsible", and rather the government would "stay out of the conflict" while seeking a negotiated end to the fighting[155]. In the end, despite public, parliamentary and presidential mobilization, Demirel's cautious position prevailed, also as a consequence of Russian warning declarations regarding a possible Turkish military intervention. The Prime Minister later argued that a military action by Turkey would have isolate Ankara on the international stage and unite global powers behind Armenia.[156]

Çiller Era I (1993–1995): Government Inconsistency, Customs Union and Rising Kurdish Militancy

Following the unexpected death of President Özal in April 1993, Demirel was elected to the presidency on 16 May of the same year. He appointed Tansu Çiller, a professor of economics, as prime minister[157], despite her lack of political and diplomatic experience. Inevitably, this appointment drew criticism from within her own party, the TPP, since many veteran politicians viewed her as not sufficiently qualified. Moreover, throughout her mandate, she progressively diverged from Demirel's view in economic and foreign policy matters, embracing a more liberal economic approach and less cautious stance in foreign affairs. She formed her first cabinet in June 1993 through a coalition with the SDPP. Erdal Inönü, who was the then leader of the SDPP and held the position of deputy prime minister in the previous government, stood aside and his role was taken over by Murat Karayalçın, the former mayor of Ankara and the newly elected SDPP leader.[158]

This coalition demonstrated greater awareness of the shifting global environment in the aftermath of the Cold War "where old patterns of confrontation have given way to cooperation and

---

[154] Harden, B. (1992, March 19). *Turkish premier voices worries over pull of ethnic conflict in Caucasus*. *The Washington Post*.

[155] *Ibid*.

[156] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 156-159

[157] The appointment of a woman as a Prime Minister in a Muslim country was seen as a significant landmark. See Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p* 140

[158] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 159-161

competition at regional and global levels"[159] which conferred new meaning to "Turkey's geopolitical position and responsibilities"[160], and its program explicitly addressed the new challenges of the post-bipolar world arguing for a multi-dimensional foreign policy to adapt to emerging threats and opportunities. Notably, the government was "fully aware that Turkey, by virtue of its unique geographic location and cultural ties, has gained an increasingly central role in the shaping of the new international order, stretching from the Balkans and the Black Sea to the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East"[161] and that "in the aftermath of the Cold War, the strengthening of European security in the Balkans, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus, and the enhancement of peace and cooperation in the Europe–Eurasia–Middle East triangle are our primary objectives"[162]. A key aspect of the government's agenda was the purpose of enhancing relations with the European Community (EC), because, from the perspective of the government: "The European Union of the future can only be realized within a natural framework that includes Turkey. Our commitment is to make every effort to develop our relations with the European Community in line with the perspective of full membership and to ensure that Turkey plays a full role in the context of European security and defense"[163]. Indeed, one of its key goals was the completion of the Custom Union with the EC, which "[constituted] an important stage in these efforts"[164] and that eventually was signed in March 1995[165] and entered into force in 1996.

In February 1995, the SDPP merged with the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party, RPP), transforming the coalition into a new alliance between the TPP and the RPP. Deniz Baykal was elected leader of the RPP and assumed the role of vice Prime Minister in September 1995, replacing Karayalçın. However, political tensions soon arose between Çiller and Baykal, notably over economic policy, which led to Çiller's resignation and dissolution of the government. She tried to form a new one in October 1995. It was a short-lived minority government that failed to pass the parliamentary vote of confidence. Subsequently, a new cabinet

---

[159] T.C. Resmî Gazete. (1993, July 6). *TBMM kararı: Bakanlar Kuruluna güvenildiğine dair (Karar No. 247)* [Grand National Assembly decision: On the vote of confidence granted to the Council of Ministers (Decision No. 247)]. *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, (21629), 1, p. 5,6

[160] *Ibid*.

[161] *Ibid*.

[162] Ibid.

[163] *Ivi*, p.7

[164] *Ibid*.

[165] An achievement that was celebrated by the government as major diplomatic success and as a milestone in Turkey's path toward European integration.

was established as TPP-RPP coalition again in October 1995, which was just a provisional government aiming to take the country to general elections on 24 December 1995.[166]

During Çiller's three consecutive governments between June 1993 and October 1995, Turkey experienced: inconsistency on foreign policy actions due to the instability of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - where, in the time span of two and a half year, six different ministers were appointed – weakening Turkey's diplomatic effectiveness; a severe economic turbulence characterized by hyperinflation, heavy public sector debt, and a significant balance of payment deficit which culminated in a major financial crisis in January 1994 which, despite the introduction of an austerity package in April of the same year, did not resolve; lastly, the Kurdish issue, caused by the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) – after the international intervention in Northern Iraq, following the Gulf War, created a safe place for PKK militants beyond Turkey and Hussein's control[167] – intensified, since the movement became increasingly violent.

Facing economic hardships and growing PKK violence, Çiller adopted an increasingly nationalist tone and allowed the military greater autonomy in policy matters and implicitly transferring some of the civilian government's powers to the armed forces that almost autonomously exerted cross-border operations into Northern Iraq, involving airstrikes on PKK positions and ground offensive.[168] This shift toward nationalist rhetoric was also a strategic move to regain public support. However, this trend reinforced the military's growing influence over both domestic and foreign policy in the context of fragile civil political effectiveness.[169]

Short-Lived Coalitions and Political Fragmentation (1995–1996)

The parliamentary elections of December 1995 resulted in a fragmented political environment with no party securing a neat majority. The TPP, still led by Tansu Çiller, experienced a decline in support and finished third, behind the MP. Remarkably, the Islamist *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party,

[166] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 159-161

[167] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era p. 171

[168] *Ibid*.

[169] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 159-161; Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 141

WP), under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, emerged as the new leading party, securing 21.4% of the vote. However, despite his electoral success, Erbakan failed to form a sustainable coalition government. As a consequence, President Demirel endorsed Mesut Yılmaz, leader of the MP, to form a government. A minority government was finally established in coalition with Çiller's TPP in March 1996. And the *Demokratik Sol Parti* (Democratic Left Party, DLP), led by Bülent Ecevit, agreed to support the coalition externally without formally joining it. Thus, the coalition ended up uniting two rival center-right parties which established Turkey's full membership in the European Union (EU) as a key objective in their policy agenda, and the willing of assume a commitment to avoid the establishment of an independent Kurdish entity in the Northern Iraq, thus preserving Iraq's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Ultimately, the political rivalry between the two center-right parties emerged and turned into lack of confidence and public accusation between Yılmaz and Çiller concerning corruption and political misconduct. The disputes led to the collapse of the coalition when Çiller withdrew her party's support, inducing Yılmaz to resign in June 1996.[170]

Erbakan–Çiller Coalition (1996–1997): Islamist Foreign Policy, D-8 Initiative, and Tensions with the Military

After the collapse of the Yılmaz–Çiller coalition, President Demirel entrusted Necmettin Erbakan with the task of forming a new government. On 28 June 1996, Erbakan and Çiller reached an agreement and established the 54th government of the Republic of Turkey. This marked a historic milestone in the Turkish Republic being the first time that a pro-Islamist party assumed a leading role in government.

The Welfare Party-True Path Party coalition was characterized by significant ideological inconsistencies. Indeed, domestically, while the TPP advocated for a liberal and open market economy, the WP favored a form of state-controlled liberalism[171]. Moreover, if the TPP had a neat secular orientation, the WP clearly embraced Islamist principles. These contradictions furtherly

[170] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 161-162

[171] Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. (2013). *Koalisyon hükümetleri, koalisyon protokolleri, hükümet programları ve genel kurul görüşmeleri (Cilt 3)* (Haz. Dr. İ. Neziroğlu & Dr. T. Yılmaz). Ankara: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Yayınları, p. 2354, 2355

emerged in foreign policy discourse: while the TPP supported Western integration and full EU membership, Erbakan's party manifested deep mistrust toward the West[172] and its institutional framework. In contrast, it promoted alignment with Islamic countries through initiatives that mirrored the Western ones such as an Islamic Common Market, an Islamic NATO, and Islamic UNESCO, and a unified Islamic currency[173]. Initiatives that often coupled with party's foreign policy arguments marked by anti-Western, anti-American, anti-Zionist, and at times anti-Semitic elements.[174]

During his roughly one-year mandate, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan restricted his official international visits exclusively to Muslim-majority countries. His first trip abroad was to Iran in August 1996 where he struck a $23 billion natural gas agreement. The deal drew criticism from Western governments because of the engagement with a country defined as a "rogue state" due to its alleged support for terrorism. Iran was followed by a ten-day tour across several Muslim states in Asia, including Pakistan, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

A diplomatic engagement that supported Erbakan's idea of creating the *Developing Eight* (D-8)[175]. A group of Muslim developing nations which included Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria, whose main objective was to foster socio-economic development and improve developing countries' positions in the world economy through new trade opportunities, and enhanced participation in decision-making processes at international level[176]. The D-8 held its inaugural foreign ministers' meeting in Istanbul on 22 October 1996, followed by a second session in January 1997, also hosted in Istanbul.

Erbakan's second official trip abroad was undertaken in October 1996 and included visits to Egypt, Libya, and Nigeria. In Libya, however, he was unexpectedly highly criticized by Gaddafi for Turkey's close ties with the United States and Israel, as well as for its stance on the Kurdish issue. Indeed, Colonel Gaddafi declared that: "Turkey's foreign policy is wrong from A to Z […] and under American control [and] has concluded an accord with Israel, the enemy of Islam […]

[172] *Ibid*.

[173] *Ivi*, p. 2374, 2376

[174] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 162-166

[175] *Ibid*.

[176] D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation. (n.d.). *Purposes & objectives*.

this is a betrayal of Turkey's historic mission"[177]. This diplomatic incident caused a domestic backlash where he was accused of damaging the international image of Turkey.[178]

Although his interstate diplomacy and propaganda explicitly reflected a pro-Islamist orientation, Erbakan demonstrated pragmatism in relations with Western allies and institutions[179]. For instance, during his mandate he ratified a military cooperation and education agreement with Israel, and the approval of a $600 million contract for Israel to modernize Turkish F-4 aircraft, and diversify its arms suppliers, since U.S. Congress availability to supply weapons to Ankara was more frequently slowed down by anti-Turkey lobbies[180], and reauthorized the *Provide Comfort* operation[181], which maintained a no-fly zone in Northern Iraq to enforce regional security[182]. The Kurdish conflict and the activities of the PKK played a key role in Turkey's decision to establish this new security partnership between the region's most powerful militaries and, although both countries emphasized that the agreement was not aimed at any specific third party, it was evident that Turkey also aimed to send a clear warning to Syria about the risks of continuing its support for the PKK.[183] Regarding the European Union, the WP's stance diverged completely from that of its coalition partner as already said. However, their approach to the Custom Union agreement was not in open contrast, rather they advocated for renegotiation to modify provisions which they considered disadvantageous[184] to Turkey's interest.[185]

The arrival of the Welfare Party as main partner in the coalition with the True Path Party, under the guide of the longstanding pro-Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan, generated significant discomfort among Turkey's westernized elite. This group which included much of the state

---

[177] Kinzer, S. (1996, October 9). *Tirade by Qaddafi stuns Turkey's premier*. *The New York Times*.

[178] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 162-166

[179] *Ibid*.

[180] and rather gain the Jewish lobby support. See also Chapter 1, paragraphs 1.4 and 1.6

[181] See paragraph 2.5

[182] Probably these decisions were also taken to avoid confrontation with the military which he knew he could not afford to challenge. See Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy* p. 162-166

[183] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy* p. 162-166; Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era p. 172

[184] These objections were partly rooted in the concerns of small and medium-sized business owners, that constituted a key segment of WP's electoral base, who feared the economic impact of the Custom Union. However, Erbakan's moderation on this aspect can also be interpreted as a strategic mean to keep harmony within the coalition since TPP's priority was, on the other side, to strengthen relations with the EU

[185] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 162-166; Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era p. 172

bureaucracy, political class, security establishment, and business sector, saw the first Islamist-led government in the story of the Republic as a potential threat to the secular foundation laid by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Notably, there was a fear that an Islamist administration might impose lifestyle changes aligned with religious norms, undermining secular and republican values[186]. Moreover, the elite worried that their longstanding privileges in public and private sectors could be limited over time, replaced by new appointees loyal to pro-Islamist establishment. In this context, the military which historically and institutionally has been a dominant political actor, had been wary of the coalition from the beginning. And, following Erbakan's domestic and foreign policy choices, it started criticizing the government within the National Security Council (NSC). Then as concerns raised, the armed force intensified their efforts by organizing public briefing to advocate for Kemalist principles and the secular character of the Republic against the WP-led governance, in front of different audiences such as media professionals, civil servants, business leader, judges, and academics.[187]

Tensions between the WP and the secularist elite intensified in early 1997, and a major turning point came on 11 January, when Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan hosted a dinner attended by leaders of various religious sects.[188] An event of this kind never happened in the republic's history and was perceived by Kemalists as clear direct challenge to the secular order. Then, the situation escalated when the WP mayor of Sincan, a district near Ankara, staged a theatrical event promoting jihad and sharia law, which was also attended by the Iranian ambassador to Turkey. This time, the symbolism of promoting Islamist values in a secular republic, particularly in the presence of the highest representative of a state often accuse of exporting Islamism in Turkey, provoked public indignation and caused, the following week, a military tanks parade through Sincan, signaling the possibility of intervention. Subsequently, at the 28 February 1997 meeting of the NSC, senior military leaders presented the government an 18-point list of anti-Islamist measures ranging from educational reforms to legal amendments[189]. Initially, the governmental coalition sought parliamentary approval to delay any implementation. But then, military pressure led Erbakan to resign on 18 June 1997, and President Demirel to appoint the

[186] Oğur, Y. (2018, April 14). *Türkiye'yi boğan o dalgaların sonu…* Serbestiyet. Accessed August 23, 2025,

[187] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 166-170

[188] Ferzan Tube. (2018, April). *Erbakan'ın tarikat liderlerine iftar yemeği (1997)* [Video]. YouTube

[189] Gündoğan, B. (2019, February 27). *"Postmodern darbe"nin 22. yılı* [22nd anniversary of the "postmodern coup"]. Anadolu Ajansı.

opposition leader Mesut Yılmaz to from a new government. This was the end of the WP-TPP coalition. The period from the 28 February NSC meeting to the coalition's collapse became known as the *28 February Process* or as a *postmodern coup d'état*.[190]

Yılmaz's Post-28 February Government (1997–1999): EU Setback and Syria Confrontation

As a consequence of these events, Mesut Yılmaz was called to constitute a minority government on 30 June 1997. It was a coalition which included the Motherland Party (MP), led by Yılmaz himself, another center-right party, the Democrat Turkey Party (DTP), and the center-left Democratic Left Party (DLP). The new government was further supported externally by the Republican People's Party (RPP). The coalition protocol identified as primary foreign policy objectives the improvement of regional relations, the strengthen of ties with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), though without proposing a specific resolution to the conflict, to swiftly complete the obligations of the Customs Union to advance the goal of full EU membership and to frame the Cyprus question more significantly as a matter of national security for Turkey itself, not only for the TRNC[191].

Undoubtedly, one key foreign policy event during this period was the European Union's rejection of Turkey's full membership application at the *Luxembourg Summit in 1997*. The decision provoked harsh critics from Ankara which denounced it as unjust and biased, and announced the suspension of political negotiations with Brussels. This setback caused many Turkish political leaders and public figures to wonder whether the pursuit of EU membership was still worth it all the efforts to meet the requirements[192].

Since the establishment of the government came out of the controversial event of the postmodern coup d'état, the new coalition was compelled to implement the anti-Islamist measures that were dictated by the armed forces. Indeed, the coalition itself was the evidence of an increased military's political leverage over the combination of weak coalitions governments and impellent

[190] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 166-170

[191] T.C. Resmî Gazete. (1997, July 13). *TBMM Kararı* Bakanlar Kuruluna güven oylaması hakkında [Grand National Assembly decision: On the vote of confidence granted to the Council of Ministers (Decision No. 509)]. *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, (23048).

[192] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 172-173; Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, p. 171-172

security challenges. And this influence was visible in foreign policy decisions. For example, in September 1998, *General Atilla Ateş*, commander of Turkish Land Forces, publicly warned Syria to cease providing refuge to Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the PKK.[193] A military-led initiative which was followed by a harsh diplomatic confrontation that ultimately resulted in the *Adana Agreement* on October 20, 1998, and Öcalan's expulsion. Notably, Damascus decided to commit: to expel Öcalan who, at the time of the signing "[was] not in Syria and he definitely will not be allowed to enter Syria"; that "PKK camps are not operational and definitely will not be allowed to become active", signaling the closing of all PKK training bases in Syria; but also that "on the basis of the principle of reciprocity, will not permit any activity which emanates from its territory aimed at jeopardizing the security and stability of Turkey. Syria will not allow the supply of weapons, logistic material, financial support to and propaganda activities of the PKK on its territory"; and that "[had] recognized that the PKK is a terrorist organization"[194]. Bringing, eventually, an end to the almost 15-year dispute between the two countries.

Ecevit's Interim Government (1999) and the 57th Coalition (1999–2002): EU Candidacy and Greek Rapprochement

Disagreements among coalition partners brought the Yılmaz's government to a close, leading to the formation of a minority administration by Bülent Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DLP) in January 1999. Supported externally by the MP and the TPP, its main objective was to guide the country to the scheduled April 1999 elections. In the election, the DLP itself secured the first place with 22% of the vote and a new government was formed in May in coalition with the *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Action Party, NAP) and the MP, with Ecevit continuing as prime minister. This period was characterized by economic hardship that caused domestic political conflict and that ultimately led the government to sign agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and follow its policy prescriptions.[195]

[193] *Ibid*.

[194] Cem, İ. (1998, October 20). *Statement made by Ismail Cem, Foreign Minister, on the special security meeting held between Turkey and Syria*. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[195] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 173-174

On the foreign policy front, a significant development was the European Union's decision in 1999, at the Helsinki summit, to recognize Turkey official candidate status. This inaugurated a new phase in Turkish diplomacy characterized by the implementation of norms aligning with EU on sensitive issues such as Cyprus, disputes with Greece in the Aegean, and the Armenian question. Moreover, Ecevit government accelerated political reforms to meet the *Copenhagen Criteria.*[196]

Rapprochement with Greece was indeed another significant shift in foreign policy. Besides the existing historical disputes between the two countries concerning Aegean issues. Tensions peaked on 15 February 1999 when Abdullah Öcalan was captured in the Greek Embassy in Kenya possessing a Greek diplomatic passport. However, after the 1999 devastating earthquake in Turkey and the providing of humanitarian aid by Greece, the two countries started to get closer. In December of the same year, following Turkey's EU candidate status both countries signed multiple agreements covering security, migration, energy, environment, education, tourism, and other fields.[197]

This government was also able to improve relations with the United States. Indeed, Washington supported Ankara's position in several situations, including its EU candidacy, participation in Western European Union, and the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project between Turkey and Azerbaijan. On the other side, Turkey supported U.S. policies on Iraq and Iran and the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999.[198]

While Ecevit's government achieved a relatively successful foreign policy record, it struggled domestically because of economic pressures and political friction, eventually calling early elections in 2002.

2.2 The Balkans: Turkish Diplomacy in a Fragmented Region

Until the 1990s, Turkey's engagement with the Balkans mainly regarded Ankara's government's concerns about the treatment of ethnic Turkish minorities in countries like Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania. Indeed, while relations with Yugoslavia remained generally cordial, ties with Bulgaria were often tense and strained by Sofia's discriminatory treatment

[196] *Ibid*. and see paragraph 2.3 and 2.6

[197] *Ibid*.

[198] Ibid. and see paragraph 2.5

towards the considerable Turkish minority. However, the end of the Cold War brought a remarkable shift in Ankara's Balkan policy.[199]

Turkey's Role in the Yugoslav Wars and the Kosovo Crisis

The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of violent ethno-nationalist conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo concerned Turkey, especially due to fears that regional instability might spread toward its borders. In response, Turkey adopted a more proactive stance, through diplomatic engagement and active participation in international peacekeeping operations to help stabilize the region. This renewed activism was driven by multiple factors: the historical presence of Balkan-origin communities within Turkey fostered public sensitivity and made political pressure for Turkey's involvement; then, Ankara's strategic calculation was influence by its rivalry with Greece, as both states competed for influence in the post-Yugoslav space; and lastly, the closer cooperation with the U.S. in the context of shared regional security concerns, eased Turkey's involvement[200]. Initially, Ankara was wary of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and criticized EU policies which aimed to this end, notably the recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 and later the support for Bosnia and Herzegovina,[201]. However, Turkey's stance began to shift as the scale of Serbian atrocities against Bosnian Muslims became widely known. In fact, the impact of daily televised reports of ethnic cleansing mobilized strong public feeling in Turkey, prompting the governments to advocate for decisive Western interventions. At this point, Ankara actively pushed for NATO-led military action, to sanction *Slobodan Milošević*'s regime, and extended covert military support to the Bosnian Muslim forces. Then, frustrated by European hesitancy, Turkey aligned more closely with the United States welcoming the *Dayton Peace Agreement* in 1995, and became a central partner in U.S.-backed efforts to rebuild the Bosnian Muslim-Croat Federation's military capacity.[202]

[199] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, p. 176-178

[200] Largely through multilateral platforms rather than unilateral moves.

[201] Beyond fears of regional destabilization, Turkish policymakers were particularly sensitive to the precedent that Balkan secessionist movements could determine for Kurdish separatism within Turkey's own borders.

[202] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, p. 176-178

Turkey maintained its multilateral and assertive approach to the Balkans during the Kosovo crisis of 1998 which still constituted a matter of regional stability and order. However, its stance in Kosovo was clearly more cautious. Besides the traditional reticence to secessionist movements, another reason was that the ethnic Turkish minority in Kosovo, estimated at around 30,000 individuals, did not align with the Albanian cause, and expressed legitimate fears of potential marginalization within an Albanian-dominated polity. Thus, unlike its active lobbying during the Bosnian conflict, Ankara refrained from engaging in diplomatic efforts in defense of the Kosovar Albanians or from advocating for them in international forums. Nevertheless, Turkey upheld NATO decisions, supporting sanctions against Belgrade and contributing a limited number of F-16 fighter jets for NATO operations taking off from Italy. After the cessation of hostilities, Turkey reinforced its commitment to regional security by deploying 1,000 troops to participate in the UN peacekeeping mission in Kosovo.[203]

During the 1990s, Turkey actively sought to strengthen its political, economic, and military relations with several Balkan countries[204]. As part of this purpose, Turkey was quick to recognize the newly independent Republic of Macedonia in 1992[205], and to sign a bilateral military cooperation agreement. Similarly, the collapse of communist regimes in Albania and Bulgaria created new opportunities for Turkish diplomacy. Albania, with its Ottoman legacy and Muslim majority, welcomed Ankara's support which included military aid, officer training, and the building of a naval base on the Adriatic[206]. Then, Turkish's relations with Bulgaria, historically strained during the Cold War, underwent a significant shift during the 1990s. Indeed, the democratic reforms in Bulgaria, and the cessation of oppressive policies against the country's 1.5 million ethnic Turks laid the groundwork for a thaw in bilateral relations. Thus, trade between the two countries expanded, and this warming of ties was marked by high-level visits, the signing of a Treaty of Friendship, and Turkey's endorsement of Bulgaria's NATO aspirations.[207]

---

[203] *Ivi*. p, 178

[204] A purpose that must be framed in the broader rivalry with Greece.

[205] Becoming the second country to do so and the first to establish an embassy in Skopje in 1993. Greece, by contrast, opposed Macedonia's name and flag.

[206] Nonetheless, economic relations between the two countries never reached a comparable size as that of Italy and Greece.

[207] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era p. 178-179

2.3 Greek–Turkish Relations and the Cyprus Question

Notwithstanding the broader international transformation of the post-Cold War era, Turkey's relationship with Greece remained largely unchanged. Throughout the 1990s, attempts at rapprochement repeatedly failed, leaving the long-standing disputes unresolved. Notably, the core of Greek-Turkish tensions remained the dispute over Cyprus where conflicting interests and strong national sentiments continually fueled confrontation.[208]

The Failure of the Boutros-Ghali Initiatives, EU Renewed Disputes, and Stalled negotiations (1992–1998)

Following the failure of the 1992 United Nations-sponsored *Set of Ideas* negotiations - launched under UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali to achieve a settlement grounded on bi-communal, bi-zonal federation rationale, and collapsed because of the reluctance of Greek Cypriots to accept full political equality and territorial concessions[209] - hopes for progress furtherly diminished with the election of Glafcos Clerides as President of Cyprus in February 1993, who was less willing to accommodate Turk-Cypriot requests. Thus, instead of pushing for another comprehensive settlement, Boutros-Ghali proposed a step-by-step strategy, through a package of "confidence-building measures". Which aimed to create limited areas of agreement - such as the reopening of Nicosia airport, which was closed since 1974, for use by both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and returning Varosha, a district of Famagusta held by Turkish forces since 1974, but never inhabited by Turkish Cypriots, to Greeks - that might subsequently lead towards a broader reconciliation. Although both communities accepted these ideas in principles, the long negotiations, between May 1993 and May 1994, first under UN sponsorship and later with U.S. involvement, came to nothing and collapsed. Moreover, when in July 1994 the European Court of Justices issued a ruling that effectively blocked Turkish Cypriot exports to the EU, the National Assembly of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) amended its constitution by

[208] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 194

[209] Theodoulou, M. (n.d.). *1992–1994 Ghali set of ideas*. *Cyprus Mail*

removing the clause referring to a potential confederation with the Greeks and refused to pursue the negotiations launched the year before as long as the ruling remained in place.[210]

From 1995, the Greek Cypriot leadership began to focus more on European Union membership. And Athens used its EU-Turkey Customs Union approval as a leverage to the EU to swiftly open the accession talks within six months after the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference revising the Maastricht Treaty[211]. In fact, negotiations were launched in January 1998.

However, between 1996 and 1998, the Cyprus problem entrenched with new disputes erupting between Greece and Turkey which deteriorated Ankara's relations with the EU. In January 1996, tensions escalated over the islet of *Kardak* (Imia in Greek) in the Aegean Sea, only a few miles from both Turkey's coast and the Greek island of Kalymnos. At some point, the mayor of Kalymnos raised a Greek flag on the rocks, which triggered Turkish journalists from *Hürriyet* to remove it, and the Greek navy to replace it again[212]. This flag incident sparked intense nationalist reactions in both countries, and a military clash was closely avoided thanks to urgent U.S. mediation and without any settlement of the territorial dispute.[213] In January 1997, tensions rose again when Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides announced the purchase of 48 Russian *S-300* air defense missiles, capable of targeting both Cyprus and parts of Turkey. The decision was seen in Ankara as a major provocation that led the then Foreign Minister Tansu Çiller to warn of the use of the air force if the missiles were installed. Finally, in December 1998, the crisis was overcome when Clerides, pressured by the U.S., agreed not to proceed with the installation.[214]

In June 1997, the arrival of a coalition government under Mesut Yılmaz signaled Ankara's readiness to improve its relations with Western partners, including Greece. Indeed, at the NATO summit in Madrid the following month, Athens and Ankara together pledged to pursue peaceful relations, mutual respect for sovereignty and international treaties. Moreover, new UN-sponsored negotiations were launched between Rauf Denktash, the then president of the TRNC, and Glafcos Clerides, first at Troutbeck, New York (July 1997), and then in Glion, Switzerland (August 1997). However, these talks quickly stalled because the lack of participation of the TRNC to the EU

---

[210] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 195

[211] It was the Intergovernmental Conference that then led to the Treaty of Amsterdam, signed in June 1997.

[212] Atlamazoglou, S. (2022, May 8). *Imia-Kardak Island dispute between Greece, Turkey almost sparked war*. Business Insider.

[213] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 196

[214] *Ibid*.

accession negotiations made Denktash to oppose them. Then, the EU's Luxembourg summit decision of December 1997, that excluded Turkey from the enlargement process, furtherly undermined the conditions to progress on the Cyprus issue.[215]

From Crisis to Rapprochement: Greek-Turkish Relations, the Helsinki Turning Point, and the Annan Plan (1999-2002)

More promising developments in Greek-Turkish relations did not appear until 1999. The capture of Abdullah Öcalan in Nairobi in February of that year, in Greek embassy's premises, revealed Greece's ambiguous involvement in the affair and triggered political consequences in Athens, including the dismissal of Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos.[216] Prime Minister Costas Simitis used the occasion to launch a new beginning in ties with Ankara. Indeed, in May 1999, Greece's new foreign minister, George Papandeou, accepted Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem's proposal for a bilateral dialogue. Through the summer and autumn, the two sides held a series of meetings that focused on non-controversial issues such as trade, tourism, and environmental cooperation, but also addressing counterterrorism. Sensitive issues like the Aegean seabed rights and territorial waters were deliberately left aside. Lastly, external events accelerate this reproachment. In fact, after the devastating Turkish earthquake of 17 August 1999, Greece provided swift and generous assistance, and when Athens was struck itself by its own earthquake on 7 September, a Turkish rescue team was immediately involved. These gestures triggered a striking shift in media narratives.[217]

Nevertheless, Cyprus remained the most difficult challenge to be resolved. In November 1999, under heavy pressure from the U.S. and UN, Denktash agreed to participate in proximity talks in New York with Clerides. These negotiations produced little progress: Denktash advocated for a looser "confederation", while Clerides insisted on a "federation", fearing that a confederal structure would allow the Turkish Cypriots to secede in the future[218]. The framework then changed

[215] *Ivi, p.* 197

[216] Singh, T., & Recknagel, C. (1999, February 9). *Turkey: Ocalan affair ignites dispute in Greece*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

[217] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 197

[218] *Ibid.*

again the following month when the European Council in Helsinki decided to recognize Turkey as a candidate for EU membership on the same basis as other applicant states. However, this demanded a key concession to Greece: the Republic of Cyprus could join the EU too, and without a prior internal settlement[219]. Although this last obligation did not coincide with Ecevit view, he accepted the Helsinki terms and turned the resolving of the Cyprus dispute into an urgent priority for Ankara, since it was the only major foreign policy issue where Turkey sill stood isolated internationally, undermining its broader integration with the West.[220]

Indeed, the Helsinki summit fostered the ongoing rapprochement between Greece and Turkey. Indeed, in January 2000, Greek foreign minister George Papandeou traveled to Ankara, the first visit of this kind in 36 years, to sign accords aimed at encouraging bilateral investment, avoiding double taxation, combating organized crime, limiting illegal migration, and promoting cooperation in tourism and environmental protection. Ismail Cem, his counterpart, returned the gesture visiting Athens on 3 February 2000, which led to five additional agreements in cultural and economic fields. Although the main contentious issues over Aegean maritime boundaries and offshore resource rights remained unresolved[221]. Nonetheless, dialogue between Cem and Papandreou continued, and by April 2002, they undertook a joint diplomatic mission to Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat in an attempt to ease tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[222]

At the beginning of 2000s, the Cyprus question remained the most divisive issue between Greece and Turkey. In January 2000, Presidents Clerides and Denktash resumed direct negotiations on a constitutional framework under the mediation of *Alvaro de Soto*, Special Adviser on Cyprus to UN Secretary-General *Kofi Annan.* Yet, as in the past, these discussions failed to produce a settlement by the established deadline of June 2002. This impasse led Kofi Annan to present, in November 2002, a comprehensive settlement proposal widely described as the most detailed plan for resolving the Cyprus issue[223]. The draft envisaged the creation of a bi-zonal federation named the *United Cyprus Republic*, with shared sovereignty and a constitutional prohibition on both partition and union with another state. Institutionally, a bicameral legislature was envisioned with

[219] See paragraph 2.6

[220] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 197

[221] Which consisted in mandatory elements to be resolved to allow Turkey's EU accession negotiations. See paragraph 2.6

[222] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 198

[223] *Ibid.*

a 48-member Chamber of Deputies, reflecting population ratios, but guaranteeing at least 12 Turkish Cypriot seats, and a 48-member Senate divided equally between the two communities. Then, the executive power would rest with a Presidential Council composed of six voting and three non-voting members, proportionally drawn from both sides which would would elect a rotating President and Vice-President serving for 20 months.[224] Finally, the plan foresaw territorial adjustments, reducing Turkish Cypriot control to 28% of the island, a progressive withdrawal of foreign troops, leaving only 950 Greek and 750 Turkish soldiers, and temporal restriction on freedom of settlement and property ownership between the two constituent states until Turkey's eventual EU accession.[225]Deep-rooted disputes were hard to eradicate and resisted both international mediation and modifying regional contexts. However, the gradual turn from confrontation to dialogue after the 1999 was evidence that this antagonism was not immutable.

2.4 The Caucasus and Central Asia: Ethnic Solidarity vs. Realpolitik

Turkey's Energy Diplomacy and Strategic Engagement in the Caspian Region

After the dissolution of the USSR, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan emerged as independent states, marking a turning point in Turkey's foreign policy towards Central Asia and the Caspian region. These newly sovereign states offered Ankara the opportunity to strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet space thanks to historical, linguistic, and cultural affinities with Turkic peoples which constituted a strong foundation for engagement[226]. Turkey's interest in the Caspian region was also significantly shaped by the emergence of these countries as major potential energy suppliers. First, with a rapidly growing domestic demand for natural gas, Ankara sought to diversify its energy imports and reduce its dependence on Russian supplies. Secondly, this economic rationale was coupled with broader geopolitical ambitions, since Turkish policymaker saw the development and transportation of Caspian energy resources as a critical element in the regional power dynamics, which involved Russia, Iran, and Turkey itself.

[224] United Nations. (2004, March 31). *The comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem*. United Nations.

[225] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 198

[226] See Chapter 1, paragraph 1.4

And, by positioning as the central hub in the East-West energy corridor, facilitating the transit of Caspian oil and gas to European and global markets, Ankara hoped to elevate its strategic value for its Western partners.[227]

Pursuing its strategic and economic objectives Turkey deepened political and diplomatic engagement with the energy-rich states, notably Azerbaijan. A key milestone came in 1994, when the *Turkish Petroleum Company* (TPC), a state-owned enterprise, became a partner in the *Azerbaijan International Operating Company* (AIOC) – a consortium formed to exploit the Caspian Sea's oil fields – through the acquisition of a 6.75% equity stake. At the same time, Turkey moved to secure future energy flows by signing a series of bilateral and multilateral gas agreements with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Beyond contracts, Ankara became a central actor in the geopolitical struggle over pipeline routes to transport Caspian hydrocarbons to global markets. An issue which involved not only the producing states, but also transit countries (such as Turkey, Russia, and Iran), Western energy companies, and the United States. To this end, and throughout 1990s, Turkey was strongly engaged to promote *Baku-Ceyhan pipeline* - which would connect Azerbaijan's capital with Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, bypassing both Russia and Iran – investing significant diplomatic effort, particularly in Washington, to gain international backing for the project. Ultimately, the United States supported the Turkish initiative, viewing the Baku-Ceyhan route as a way to prevent Russia from consolidating strategic control over regional energy transit infrastructure, but also as a way to guarantee "the sovereignty and independence of the new states"[228], "improving the energy security of the United States, Turkey and other [US'] allies"[229]. The American engagement included both diplomacy, Export-Import Bank, Overseas Private Investment Corporation and Trade and Development Agency[230]. And, by the late 1990s, cooperation over Caspian energy had become a core component of US-Turkish relations.[231]

From Nagorno-Karabakh to Chechnya: Ankara's Dilemmas in Regional Crises

[227] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy, p. 173-174

[228] White House. (1999, November 17). *Background briefing by senior administration official on Caspian-Sea diplomacy and the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline* [Press briefing]. The White House.

[229] *Ibid.*

[230] *Ibid.*

[231] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy, p. 173-174

The outbreak of ethnic and separatist conflicts in the Caucasus, notably in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Chechnya, triggered significant concerns in Turkey regarding regional stability and energy security, and constituted the most serious point of tension between Turkey and Russia, because, in each crisis, both sides tended to take opposite positions[232]. These crises developed in areas geographically very proximate to Turkey and involved Turkic and other Muslim populations with which Ankara had strong historical and cultural bonds. Moreover, within Turkey itself, considerable communities of Abkhazians, Azeris, and Chechens intensively lobbied to pressure Ankara's government to adopt more assertive policies, including the possibility of direct intervention, in support of their kin. Such lobbying placed Ankara in a delicate position, especially in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh war, where Armenian forces had occupied approximately one-fifth of Azerbaijan's territory but, despite the intensity of domestic sympathies for Azerbaijan and the strategic significance of the conflict, Turkish authorities opted for a cautious and restrained approach, unwilling to be drawn into a military involvement that could provoke confrontations with Russia.[233]

With regard to secessionist movements in Georgia and Chechnya, they posed a further dilemma for Turkey, given its own domestic struggle against Kurdish separatism. Open endorsement of separatism abroad risked undermining Ankara's stance against similar movements at home, thereby reinforcing the preference for a policy of strategic caution in the region.[234] The Chechens rebelled against Russian rule during 1994-6 and 1999, and in these conflicts, public opinion largely sided with them, seeing them as fellow Muslims, even though they were not ethnically related[235]. Diaspora groups supported solidarity and cultural associations, some of which maintained ties with ultra-nationalist and Islamist parties. These organizations were reported to have raise funds and sent unofficial volunteers to Chechnya. However, Turkish governments avoided offering open or explicit backing, wary that such actions could push Russia to extend financial or logistical support to the PKK. For this reason, in February 1995, Ankara and Moscow signed a security protocol which pledged cooperation against terrorism and organized crime, and implicitly committing both sides to refrain from involvement in the Kurdish or Chechen

[232] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 210

[233] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy, p. 175

[234] *Ibid.*

[235] Although, it was estimated that approximately 25,000 Turkish citizens are of Chechen descent.

conflicts.[236] This act was furtherly reaffirmed in November 1999, when Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit visited Moscow during the intensification of Russia's second campaign in Chechnya. The Prime Minister, while acknowledging the conflict's serious humanitarian concern, he maintained that it remained an internal Russian matter.[237]

At the end of the 1990s, Turkey's ambition to assume a leading role in the Caucasus and Central Asia following the Cold War achieved only partial success. If on one side Ankara managed to solidify its presence in the newly independent Turkic republics, and fostered growing economic and cultural ties, on the other its broader aspirations to become the primary political and economic partner of these states failed. This unsuccess was primarily due to Turkey's limited economic and logistical capacities, but also to geographic discontinuity, to the still influent presence of Russia in the region, and to the cautious of the Turkic republic leaderships, wary of replacing one dominant external actor (the Soviet Union) with another and thus resisting to any attempt to create dependence from another state.[238]

2.5 Strategic Realignments with the United States: From Provide Comfort to the War on Terror

Overall, Ankara-Washington ties improved in the early 1990s, but had some frictions in the following years. Turkey's stance towards third parties such as Israel, Iran, Iraq, and the Iraqi Kurds, played a decisive role in shaping the relation between the two countries.[239]

Strategic Partnership and Early Post-Cold War Strains

The Gulf War already reaffirmed Turkey's role as a relevant regional actor. Nevertheless, President Özal's proposal for a *strategic partnership* with the United States, presented during his

[236] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy* p. 210

[237] *Ivi,* p. 211

[238] Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy, p. 175

[239] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign* p, 158

visit to Washington in March 1991, was initially declined. However, the dissolution of the USSR and the emerging of Russia as an antagonist of American interests in the area, led President Bush to revise its position and proposing, in February 1992, during Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's visit to Washington, an *enhanced partnership*, whose "pillars included trade, diplomacy, NATO and CSCE membership, and a shared commitment to justice and human rights"[240], that endured and deepened throughout the 1990s, despite the frequent turnover of coalition governments in Ankara. In this way, Washington reaffirmed Turkey as a trustworthy ally and a potential model for the post-Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Zbigniew Brzezinski, already National Security Advisor under Jimmy Carter's administration,[241] characterized Turkey as a vital geopolitical axis: a stabilizing force in the Black Sea, a gatekeeper of access to the Mediterranean, a counterbalance to Russia in the Caucasus, a bulwark against Islamic extremism, and a pillar of NATO's Southern flank.[242]

In 1992, when *the Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement* (DECA) with the U.S. had to be renovated, it was extended for just one year. However, during this period, the U.S. significantly reduced its military presence in Turkey as a part of a broader post-Cold War strategy to reduce global commitments. By mid-1994, eight of the twelve American bases in Turkey had been closed or transferred to Turkish control, although the strategically important NATO air bases at İncirlik remained operational. U.S. military aid to Turkey was also significantly reduced, partly due to congressional concerns over human rights, and partly because it was seen as less necessary, until it was completely interrupted in 1999.[243]

Allied Commitments, Kurdish Dilemmas, and the "Sèvres Syndrome"

In the early 1990s, Turkey and the United States maintained a solid alliance founded on shared interests and similar positions on many policy matters. Indeed, both countries backed the accession of new Eastern European members to NATO - then realized in 1999 with the inclusion

[240] Bush, G. H. W. (1992, February 11). *Remarks at the departure ceremony for Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel of Turkey* (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George H. W. Bush, Book I, pp. 225–226). U.S. Government Publishing Office.

[241] As quoted in Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 136

[242] Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy*, p. 135-136

[243] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy, p.* 158-159

of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic - and supported the integration of former Soviet states into the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE), *NATO's Partnership for Peace*, and the *North Atlantic Cooperation Council*. Although Ankara and Washington occasionally diverged in their approach toward Russia, the U.S. firmly endorsed the creation of an East-West energy corridor to connect the Caspian basin to global markets through Turkey, bypassing Russian territory[244]. Turkey also took an active role in United Nations and later U.S./NATO-led initiatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina starting in 1993-94 and in Kosovo in 1998-99.[245]

The renewal of the mandate for the *Provide Comfort* operation became a major source of debate in Turkey, particularly after Süleyman Demirel's return to power in November 1991. Indeed, some feared that the U.S. led multinational force could be used by the United States for broader Middle Eastern operations beyond Ankara's control, or that it was part of a Western agenda to foster an independent Kurdish state, a solution with serious consequences for Turkey's own Kurdish issue. In the worst cases, this suspicion evolved into what became known as the *Sèvres syndrome*, that is the belief that Western powers aimed to carve up Turkey territorially, as was provided by the unratified Treaty of Sèvres of 1920.[246]

However, also the reasons in favor of the operation were enough persuasive. Ankara could not risk triggering an open confrontation with Washington over a central element of U.S. Middle East policy, and as long as the operation's forces remained based on Turkish soil, the government had at least a degree of influence over its conduct. The Turkish military chiefs, which preserved close ties with their American counterparts, consistently supported the persistence of the mission. And, while in opposition, both Demirel and İnönü had opposed the initiative, upon assuming office after 1991, they endorsed it, as did successive prime ministers Tansu Çiller and Bülent Ecevit. The operation also continued during the politically tense mandate of Erbakan-Çiller coalition in 1996-1997, although the government obtained to rebrand the operation as *Northern Watch* at the beginning of 1997.[247]

Following the removal of the Erbakan-led government in June 1997, Turkish-American relations return to a new stability, although there were still some points of disagreement. First and

[244] See paragraph 2.4.

[245] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 159

[246] *Ivi,* p. 162

[247] *Ivi,* p. 163

foremost, there was the issue of the status of what had effectively emerged as a distinct Kurdish political entity in Northern Iraq. For Ankara, the main concern was the PKK's capacity to re-establish bases in Iraqi Kurdish territory. Turkey was worried of the possibility that PKK could be able to found the nucleus of an independent Kurdish state. The problem with the United States arose around the possibility of Turkey to implement cross-border operations against PKK in Northern Iraq. However, when the main Kurdish political factions started fighting each other - also degenerating in civil war, between 1994 and 1996 - the international support for Kurdish independence waned, and eased Ankara's diplomatic hardships. From this moment on, Washington became more tolerant towards Turkish operations acknowledging Turkey's security concerns. The emerging Turkish-American alignment over the Kurdish question was reinforced in early 1999, when the CIA and the U.S. State Department allegedly played a decisive role in assisting Turkish authorities in the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.[248]

From Earthquake Solidarity to Post-9/11 Alliance

The good relationships were furtherly endorsed and strengthen in August of the same year, when the United States government and people mobilized themselves quicky to react to the devastating İzmit earthquake that affected Turkey, by providing humanitarian aid. Moreover, in November 1999, President Bill Clinton travelled to Turkey for the OSCE Istanbul Summit, arriving three days ahead of schedule to hold talks with Prime Minister Ecevit, meet representatives of human rights organizations and other NGOs, and address the Turkish parliament. Accompanied by his wife and daughter, Clinton also visited earthquake survivors in temporary shelters. The images of the empathy of the American president became an enduring symbol of U.S.-Turkish solidarity. And, by the close of the 1990s, relations between Turkey and the United States seemed to have come back to the levels of their strategic partnership in the 1950s. However, this renewed partnership did not prevent Ankara to be criticized in the Congress over human rights record and its stance on the Cyprus issue that still led to delays or reductions in arms shipments and military assistance.[249]

[248] *Ibid.*

[249] *Ivi,* p. 164

When George W. Bush succeeded Bill Clinton in January 2001, some disagreements seemed to appear between Ankara and the new U.S. administration. However, these concerns were quickly overcome by the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. In Turkey, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan had long been viewed negatively, and as the embodiment of reactionary extremisms even among the country's own Islamist circles[250]. On 25 September 2001, the Turkish cabinet authorized U.S. forces to use Turkish air bases to support operations in Afghanistan. Subsequently, on 10 October, Ankara's parliament approved a government motion permitting the deployment of Turkish troops in Afghanistan and allowing the stationing of foreign forces on Turkish soil. Finally, following the Taliban's expulsion, and the establishment of the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF) to support the new Afghan government, Turkish contributed first with 260 troops on 15 February 2002 then, when it took over command in June 2002, with a further contingent of 1,400 soldiers.[251]The decision to join the U.S.-led coalition was surely determined by a mix of alliance obligations and national interests. In fact, as a long-standing NATO member, Ankara felt compelling the need to demonstrate solidarity to the United States, but it is not deniable its attempt to reassert its strategic relevance in the post-Cold War era, notably at a time in which its European prospects were uncertain and its role in the transatlantic security diminished.[252]

2.6 From Customs Union to Candidacy: The Tumultuous Path of Turkey–EU Relations, 1990–2002

Turkey's journey to integrate the European Union was impacted by the end of the Cold War but not so dramatically. The EU experienced a sensitive enlargement after opening to the new freed countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and inevitably the question about Turkey's accession arose again. In the 1990s, economic relations advanced with the establishment of the Customs Union in 1996. However, soon after, progress slowed at the point it seemed the EU might

[250] Blocker, J. (1998, September 9). *Iran/Turkey: United in distrust of Taliban*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; and Hürriyet. (2001, November 1). *Ecevit: Özel harekat grubu subay ve astsubaydan oluşuyor* [Ecevit: Special operations group consists of officers and non-commissioned officers]. Bigpara (Hürriyet)

[251] *Hale, W. (2012). Turkish foreign policy,* p. 164-165

[252] Seren, M. (2020). *Appreciating Turkey's Afghanistan Policy*. Horizons, 20. Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development.

end the process altogether. Then things changed sharply in 1999, when the European Council decided in December, at the Helsinki summit, to recognize Turkey as a candidate for full membership, under the same conditions as other candidates to open accession negotiations: fulfilling the *Copenhagen criteria* of political and economic standards.[253]

The Matutes Package and the Copenhagen Criteria and the 1995 Customs Union.

The 1990s began with the European Union trying to improve relations with Turkey after the delusional answer delivered in 1989. Thus, in June 1990 the Commission issued the *Turkey package* (also known as the *Matutes package)*, which renovated the efforted to achieve a customs union with Turkey together with an enforced industrial cooperation and the release of the *Fourth Financial Protocol* funds that were blocked since 1981. Although the last step remained unrealized because of Greece's continued veto on activating the Protocol[254]. At the Lisbon summit in June 1992, European Community leaders recognized Turkey's strategic importance in the evolving European political landscape and called for closer ties following the rationale of the Association Agreement[255]. In November of the same year, the Association Council decided to restart work on implementing the Customs Union, a working program was agreed and was established the 1993 as deadline to finally achieve this goal. In June 1993, a summit was held in Copenhagen, where the heads of government of what was now the European Union established some *criteria* which defined the conditions to be met by future member states. These criteria included: the existence of stable democratic institutions which guarantee the implementation of the rule of law and the respect of human rights and protection of minorities; then a functioning market economy; and lastly the capacity to adhere to the principles of political, economic and monetary union. At this point, if the last criterion was too faded to pose a problem and the second criterion was comfortably achieved, the first one posed a very limiting condition for Turkey's society.[256]

---

[253] *Ivi,* p. 174

[254] *Ivi,* p. 175-176

[255] Council of the European Union. (1992, June 26–27). *Presidency Conclusions: European Council, Lisbon, 26–27 June 1992* [PDF document]. Council of the European Union.

[256] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 175-176

Regarding the free movement of goods, establishing the customs union was easier in the mid-1990s than it might have been earlier, since Turkey had already been moving toward a more open import regime since the early 1980s. Business circles that once feared could not compete with Western European industry had now largely shifted to supporting the idea. As a result, the customs union agreement was signed in Brussels at the Association Council meeting on 6 March 1995, with the provision of coming into force at the beginning of 1996, once Turkey had completed the necessary legal and tariff adjustments. However, two significant political conditions were attached to the agreement. The first was aimed at resolving Greek objections: the EU agreed to begin accession talks with the Greek Cypriot government of the Republic of Cyprus within six months after the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference reviewing the Maastricht Treaty. The second condition was that the customs union agreement needed approval from the European Parliament in Strasbourg before it could take effect.[257]

This issue appeared more complicated because, even though the agreement referred only to economic matters and did not commit the EU to begin membership talks, the Parliament had already condemned in several resolutions Ankara's poor human rights record and its approach to the Kurdish question. Indeed, in 1994, the Parliament had heavily criticized the removal of parliamentary immunity from deputies of the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (DEP) followed by the closure of the party itself[258]. Thus, as soon as the customs union agreement was signed in March 1995, the Parliament passed a resolution condemning the Association Council for accepting it, on the grounds that it was incoherent with Turkey's deficits in human rights, its policies on the Kurdish problem and the continuing dispute over Cyprus[259]. Throughout 1995, the European Parliament persisted in its resistance to the customs union, and possibly it became even stronger because of the actions implemented by the Çiller government's handling of the DEP issue and the confirmation in October of long term prison sentences for the party's former MPs. The Turkish government's adoption of a small package of constitutional amendments in July was widely considered inadequate. However, as the vote to approve the agreement approached, MEPs faced increasing pressure from EU governments, which were unwilling to give up a deal they had already

[257] *Ivi,* p. 175-177

[258] Amnesty International. (1997, December). *Turkey: The colours of their clothes – Parliamentary deputies serve 15 years' imprisonment for expressions of Kurdish identity* (AI Index: EUR 44/85/97).

[259] European Parliament. (1995, March 6). *Resolution on the draft agreement on the conclusion of a customs union between the EU and Turkey* (OJ C 056, p. 099). Official Journal of the European Communities

signed. In support for the customs union also engaged the United States[260], and Prime Minister Tansu Çiller herself, who argued that its implementation would help prevent the spread of Islamic radicalism in Turkey[261]. Finally, on 13 December 1995 the European Parliament renounced its reluctance and ratified the agreement by 343 votes to 149. Nonetheless, in their resolution, MEPs urged the European Commission to monitor Turkey's human rights record closely and to submit related annual reports to the Parliament.[262]

Economically, the launch of the customs union represented one of the most significant steps in Turkey-EU relations. From January 1996 onward, Turkey was required to remove all import duties and charges with equivalent effect on goods coming from the EU, and the same was imposed to the EU. Turkey also adopted the EU's relatively low common external tariff in its trade with non-member countries. While agricultural products were initially excluded, both sided pledged to work towards full liberalization of trade in this sector in the future[263]. And lastly, Turkey had to adopt a reliable legislation for the protection of patents and other intellectual property rights and to eliminate domestic barriers to competition.[264]

Overall, Turkey made greater economic concessions than the EU. Indeed, before the agreement, Turkey had a more protective trade regime while the EU's few remaining trade barriers were only quotas on textiles and garments, whose removal was a significant advantage for Turkish exporters. Notwithstanding some warned about the effect of lifting trade barriers upon Turkish market and industry, the customs union proved to be positive to Turkey and its industry adapted better than expected, benefiting from greater accesso to Western European markets, and increased competition at home. However, still Turkey faced some disadvantages because it lacked access to the EU agricultural market and free movement of labor and could not have a say in shaping EU policies that directly affected it, such as setting the common external tariff.[265]

---

[260] U.S. State Department. (1995, December 3). *Joint U.S.–European Union Action Plan* [Public policy document]. U.S. Department of State.

[261] AP Archive. (2015, July 21). *UK: Turkish PM Tansu Çiller meets with John Major in London* [Video]. YouTube.

[262] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 175-177

[263] Council of the European Communities. (1995, December 22). *Decision No 1/95 of the EC–Turkey Association Council on implementing the final phase of the Customs Union* (OJ L 35, pp. 1–47). Official Journal of the European Communities.

[264] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 177

[265] *Ivi,* p. 177-178

Political Setbacks and EU Exclusion (1996-1999)

The customs union marked a notable achievement, but it addressed only the economic dimension of EU-Turkey relations, the easiest part of the agenda. The political challenges were far more difficult to resolve. Between 1996 and 1997, the situation was complicated by Turkey's unstable domestic politics. Moreover, the formation of Necmettin Erbakan's coalition government in June 1996 compromised relations with the EU, as well as with the United States for similar reasons. In fact, during the December 1995 election campaign, Erbakan's Welfare Party had opposed EU membership, portraying the Union as a Christian Club and promoting instead the idea of a "Union of Muslim countries"[266]. And, while he supported removing trade barriers with Europe, on the other side he advocated for Turkey withdraw from or renegotiation of the customs union. During his mandate, he was strongly pressured from his coalition partner Çiller to leave aside the customs union. However, he made no effort to advance Turkey's EU accession application.[267]

Also on the European side there was no attempts to accommodate relations with Turkish government. In March 1997, the leaders of the European Christian Democrat parties – among them the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and former Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens – issued a joint statement in Brussels asserting that the European Union was fundamentally a cultural and civilization project in which Turkey had no place. Moreover, In July 1997, when European Commission President Jacques Santer unveiled the *Agenda 2000* programme. It recommended the opening of a faster track accession talks in 1998 with a selected group of Central and Eastern European states such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Estonia, but remarkably excluding Turkey from this process[268]. These events endorsed Erbakan's vision and were widely perceived as dismissive and prejudiced in Turkey. The situation worsened at the European Council summit in Luxembourg on 12-13 December 1997. During this meeting, Cyprus was added to the first group, and a second slower-track list for later stage negotiations was announced, including Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia. Turkey was offered participation in a new *European Strategy* and invited to join the *European Conference*, a forum

[266] See paragraph 2.5

[267] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 178

[268] Swardson, A. (1997, July 16). *EU picks 6 countries for talks this year on eventual membership*. *The Washington Post*.

bringing together all applicant states with existing EU members, but ultimately was excluded from both the fast and slow-track lists, causing a severe blow to Ankara's EU aspirations[269]. Indeed, in a statement immediately following the summit, the Turkish government denounced the decision as being based on biased and exaggerated judgements[270], and while pledging to maintain current ties with the EU, it also made clear that any further developments of relations would depend on Brussels changing biases.[271]

Thus, throughout 1998, the Yılmaz government maintained its stance of keeping distance from the EU. Then relations with Brussels furtherly deteriorated in February 1999 after the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in Nairobi, when the EU refrained from condemning Greece[272] for its involvement.[273]

Ecevit's Reforms and the Helsinki Breakthrough on the Eve of the AKP era (1999-2002)

With the election of Bülent Ecevit in April 1999, its coalition opened up new opportunities in relations with the EU. Not so much because of the Cyprus issue where he maintained a nationalist stance, but rather because of its commitment to improving human rights condition in Turkey. Ecevit's coalition partners were also willing to work in this direction: Devlet Bahçeli of the Nationalist Action Party did not oppose the idea of EU accession, even though he could have been less inclined to accept some political adjustments, namely on the Kurdish question; then the Motherland Party nominally supported both EU accession and political and economic liberalization. Moreover, changes occurred also within EU states. Notably, Christian Democrats lost 1998 elections and were replaced by a Social Democrat (SPD). The green coalition led by Gerhard Schröder was more favorably disposed towards Turkey. Indeed, as early as the Helsinki Summit on 9 December 1999, the main EU governments were now willing to accept Turkey's application which was accorded candidate status, along with Eastern European countries, Cyprus

[269] Council of the European Union. (1997, December 12–13). *Conclusions of the Luxembourg European Council (12 and 13 December 1997)*. CVCE – European Union Digital Archive

[270] Indeed, Slovakia which the European Commission had already noted in July 1997 did not meet the required human rights standards had still been included

[271] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 178-179

[272] See supra paragraph 2.3

[273] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 179

and Malta, and on the basis of the same criteria, that is the Copenhagen criteria. EU would commit to open up an "enhanced dialogue" with Turkey on human rights in return for Turkey's production of a "pre-accession strategy [to meet the Copenhagen requirements]"[274], resolve its border disputes, namely with Greece, or refer them to the International Court in The Hague.[275]

Within Helsinki decisions, there were two further conditions which concerned the Cyprus question. First, Turkey should actively support the UN Secretary-General to find out a solution[276]. Second, in the event that no settlement is reached between the parties then "the Council's decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition. In this the Council will take account of all relevant factors"[277]. In other words, no incentive was established to foster Cyprus[278] to reach a settlement with Ankara.[279]

Then the EU Commission issued the *Accession Partnership Document* in November 2000, detailing the political reforms should be implemented by Turkey before accession negotiations could start[280]. Namely, the Commission required that the Tukey's government should, in the short and medium terms: "strengthen legal and constitutional guarantees for the right to freedom of expression [as well as] freedom of association and peaceful assembly"[281]; "to remove any legal provisions forbidding the use by Turkish citizens of their mother tongue in TV/radio[282] broadcasting"[283]; to "ensure cultural diversity and guarantee cultural rights of all citizens irrespective of their origin. Any legal provisions preventing the enjoyment of those rights should

---

[274] European Parliament. (1999, December 10–11). *Presidency conclusions – Helsinki European Council*. Paragraph 12

[275] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 179-180

[276] Even though no such obligation was imposed upon Cyprus.

[277] European Parliament. (1999, December 10–11). *Presidency conclusions – Helsinki European Council*. Paragraph 9 (b).

[278] Some believe it was nothing but the price Greece asked in exchange for the acceptance of Northern European candidates.

[279] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 180

[280] Which constituted the most difficult requirements to meet since the economic ones did not place such a problem.

[281] Council of the European Union. (2001, March 8). *Council Decision 2001/235/EC on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey* [Official Journal of the European Communities, L 85/13]. paragraph 4.1

[282] That is to allow broadcating in Kurdish

[283] Council of the European Union. (2001, March 8). *Council Decision 2001/235/EC on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey* [Official Journal of the European Communities, L 85/13]. paragraph 4.1

be abolished, including in the field of education"[284]; the "State of Emergency"[285] in the South-Eastern provinces must be lifted; "undertake all necessary measures to reinforce the fight against torture"[286]; and to "guarantee the enjoyment by all individuals, without any discrimination […] of all human rights and fundamental freedoms"[287], and finally to implement all the constitutional and legal necessities to reduce the political role of the military by aligning "the constitutional role of the National Security Council as an advisory body to the Government in accordance with the practice of EU Member States"[288]. These were not easy tasks for the Ecevit cabinet, notably due to the fierce opposition of the Nationalist Action Party regarding all the aspects which referred to Kurdish rights.[289]

In response, Ankara's first reaction was the production of the *National Programme for the Implementation of the Aquis*. It was apparently meant to meet most of the EU's requirements, however unclear on some internally contested points such as the full abolition of the death penalty and the broadcasting and educational rights for the Kurds[290]. Moreover, on 4 October 2001, Parliament approved a package of 34 amendments to the constitution, which were approved also with the support of the opposition parties such as the pro-Islamist *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party, FP), and the newly-formed *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, JDP) which did not wish to be presented as opponents of democratization[291].

It could be said that these amendments were encouraging and sensibly witnessed a strong Turkish engagement to bringing the constitutional provisions closer to the Article 10 of the *European Convention on Human Rights*. Indeed, the new version of Articles 13 and 14 provided limitations to the restriction of basic rights and freedom, and only for reasons stated in the constitution, in accordance with "the requirements of a democratic social order", and could not be used to justify actions "with the aim of destroying the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation, or abolishing the democratic and secular Republic depending on human

[284] *Ivi,* paragraph 4.2

[285] *Ivi,* paragraph 4.2

[286] *Ivi,* paragraph 4.1

[287] *Ivi,* paragraph 4.2

[288] *Ivi,* paragraph 4.2

[289] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 181-182

[290] Council of the European Union. (2001, May 28). *Turkish national programme for the adoption of the acquis*. Council of the European Union.

[291] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 182-183

rights"[292]. From Article 26 was deleted the former provision that "no language prohibited by law shall be used in the expression and dissemination of thought"[293], and similarly was amended the Article 28 in relation to media. Also, Article 38 was amended to abolish the death penalty with the exception of events of "war, the imminent danger of war, or terrorist crimes"[294]. This brough the constitution in coherence with *Protocol 6 of the European Convention.* Finally, the amendment to Article 118 brough about an adjustment of the National Security Council, where was given the majority of the seats to civilians.[295] It was further reduced its capacity to affect government decision in general with its resolutions.[296]

These adjustments were appreciated by the EU, though not sufficiently. Indeed, at the 14-15 December 2001 European Council held in Laeken, the European leaders on the one hand greeted the amendments, but on the other hand some important aspects were still lacking. More precisely, in the *Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession*, issued by the EU Commission on 13 November 2001, was declared that notwithstanding Turkey had realized significant steps "towards strengthening guarantees in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms", it still did not meet the Copenhagen criteria[297]. In response, Ecevit's government by the end of January 2002, continued the amending process targeting the Article 312 and 159 of the Penal Code, regarding the law affecting freedom of expression, and article 8 of the *Law for the Struggle against Terrorism* of 1991. Again, on 26 March 2002, the government proposed a second package of legal changes which guaranteed more freedom to the press and activities of association, affected the closure of political parties and punished the police officers found guilty of torturing. However, before the beginning of the AKP era, the EU was not yet satisfied. Indeed, in a meeting of the *Turkish-EU Association Council* in April 2002, emerged that EU would have sought recognition to Kurds to broadcast and other cultural rights, the abolition of the death penalty in

[292] Grand National Assembly of Turkey. (2019). *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*.

[293] Republic of Turkey. (1982, November 7). *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*. Refworld.

[294] Grand National Assembly of Turkey. (2019). *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*.

[295] *Ibid*.

[296] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 182-183

[297] European Commission. (2001, November 13). *2001 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession* (SEC (2001) 1756 final). European Commission.

law, and to withdraw the emergency regime in the South-Eastern provinces[298], as already specified into the *Accession Partnership* document.[299]

2.7 Between Aspiration and Limitations

The 1990s did not identify a simple phase of stagnation or paralysis in Turkish foreign policy, as it is often believed because of the more impactful image of the domestic political inconsistency. It is rather a transitional decade that redefined the boundaries of Ankara's strategic projection. In fact, beneath the apparent weakness due to instable coalition governments, and the persistent weight of the military in foreign policy decision-making, the 1990s consolidated patterns that would lay the foundation for the more assertive orientation adopted in the 2000s. Indeed, the end of the Cold War removed the Soviet threat, created new opportunities to exert influence in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Balkans. At the same time, the crises in the Middle East revealed Turkey's vulnerability towards regional instability and the limits of reliance on the United States. Thus, the 1990s represented a bridge moment in which Turkey was still firmly tied in NATO and Western institutions, but already perceiving the call to play a wider regional role to fulfill its security interests which extended beyond its immediate borders. These latent aspirations would be later transformed into an explicit strategy of strategic autonomy and regional leadership under the AKP, as will be described in the following chapter.

[298] European Parliament. (2002, April 11). *Verbatim report of proceedings: Thursday, 11 April 2002 – Strasbourg*. Official Journal of the European Parliament.

[299] Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy,* p. 183-184

Part II – The AKP Era and Turkey's Strategic Reorientation

Chapter 3 – The AKP's Foreign Policy: Between Strategic Depth and Authoritarian Drift

3.1 Introduction

The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*) of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has recently celebrated the 24th anniversary of its foundation, and more than two decades in power. Since its rise in the early 2000s, the AKP has consistently demonstrated a peculiar ability to use foreign policy as a means to strengthen domestic legitimacy. Inevitably, Turkey's foreign policy has been deeply intertwined with domestic political dynamics.[300]

Turkey's foreign policy arguably has become increasingly inconsistent under successive AKP governments. Indeed, since the first AKP single-party government assumed office in late 2002, Turkey's relationships with the United States, the European Union, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Egypt and Greece have shifted rapidly between period of cooperation and significant crises.[301]

Over time, the AKP has pursued a range of foreign policy strategies designed to protect Turkey's interests within an increasing challenging and uncertain regional context. These strategies evolved from the exercise of soft power and identity projection to a greater reliance on hard power and securitization, and more recently towards renewed dialogue and mediation[302], possibly placing Ankara at the rank of a *smart power*[303], that is being able to combine "the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction"[304].

This chapter is organized chronologically to capture these transformations across successive phases. A chronological framework makes it easier to show how shift in domestic

[300] Giannotta, V., Çubukçuoğlu, S. S., & Al Qutbah, S. (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*. TRENDS Research & Advisory.

[301] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*. Social Research: An International Quarterly, p. 243

[302] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy*

[303] Botel-Azzinnaro, K. (2018, June 28). *Smart power rhetoric: One reason for Erdoğan's re-election*. European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

[304] Nye, J. S. (2011). *The Future of Power*. PublicAffairs, p. 208

politics and changes in the international environment intertwine between themselves, producing distinct phases in Turkey's external orientation. The chapter thus moves from the AKP's early years in government, then moves to its consolidation of power, the turning point of the Arab Spring, the post-2016 coup reorientation, and the most recent phase marked by normalization efforts and multipolar ambitions.

3.2 2002-2007: Europeanization, Reform, and the AKP's Pragmatic Foundations

From 2002 to 2007, the AKP established Turkey's first single-party government since the late 1980s. Widely recognized as the successor to the Islamist movement associated with the *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party, WP), whose members were largely removed from state institutions after the 1997 coup, the party initially lacked significant institutional influence. This institutional weakness shaped the AKP's pragmatic approach to alliances and foreign policy during its early years. The party itself was the merge of a small but influential liberal intelligentsia, pro-EU reformers, and the *Hizmet hareketi* (Hizmet Movement) led by Fethullah Gülen, a U.S.-based Muslim preacher with a growing transnational network, that emerged in the 1970s and rapidly expanded in the 1980s and 1990s, which professed a moderate interpretation of Islam, emphasizing interfaith dialogue, education, and social solidarity. Notably, the alliance with the Gülenists was vital for both their financial and media support and their presence within state institutions, particularly the police and judiciary, which had expanded under previous center-right governments.[305]

These three groups were united by a shared opposition to the military control and a common support for the EU accession process, which was placed at the center of party's foreign policy agenda. Europeanization meant again the embracing of a pragmatic choice in foreign policy in that period, notwithstanding the anti-Western heritage of some of the members of the party. However, the EU was in expansions in that period, and the membership perspective enjoyed broad popularity in Turkey, with opinion polls in the early 2000s consistently showing support above 50 percent.[306]

[305] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 247

[306] *Ibid.*

The party's electoral program that won the election on 3 November 2002 and presented for the vote of confidence by Prime Minister Abdullah Gül to the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 28 November, was grounded on three key elements: European Union Accession, macroeconomic stabilization, and a redefined foreign policy orientation.[307]

On the European front, the program explicitly recognized that "Our government considers full membership of the European Union as one of our primary goals", for the achievement of which a *National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis* will be implemented, in order to harmonize Turkey's institutions and legislations with European standards.[308]

Then the program acknowledged the economic fragility that Turkey was experiencing and pledged the government's commitment to "[preserve] economic stability, [reduce] inflation permanently, and to [maintain] public debt under control", by a "full implementation of structural reforms in line with international obligations"[309], implicitly reaffirming adherence to IMF stabilization programs.[310]

Finally, the program defined a vision for foreign policy that later would be described as *zero problems with neighbors*, by declaring that "Turkey will pursue a foreign policy aimed at strengthening peace, stability, and cooperation in our surrounding regions", and "play a bridging role between Europe and Asia, [while] contributing actively to regional and global peace".[311]

The government really implemented significant constitutional and legislative reforms in the program pledged direction. Among the most significant changes, there was the abolition of the death penalty, the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the adoption of the *EU-Turkey harmonization packages*[312], which reinforced democratization, civilian supremacy over the military and paved the way for further gradual institutional transformation, while maintaining a claim to Turkey's traditional pro-Western orientation although the Muslim essence.[313] The implementation of these reforms enhanced the AKP's credibility both domestically

---

[307] T.C. Resmî Gazete. (2002, November 29) *TBMM Kararı:* Başbakan Abdullah Gül tarafından TBMM'ne sunulan 58 inci Hükümet Programı [The 58th Government Programme presented to TBMMne by Prime Minister Abdullah Gul] *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, (24950).

[308] *Ibid.*

[309] *Ibid.*

[310] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy*

[311] T.C. Resmî Gazete. (2002, November 29)

[312] Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretariat General for EU Affairs. (2007). *Political reforms in Turkey*. Ankara: Secretariat General for EU Affairs

[313] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy.*

and internationally, particularly among Western governments and financial markets, and contributed to Turkey's economic recovery. On the other side, as this Islamist framed government appeared to align with the west, segments of Turkey's secular nationalist elite increasingly started advocating for an anti-Atlanticist alliance with Russia, China, and Iran.[314]

In those years, by employing and legitimizing European rhetoric in the public sphere - also reversing Ankara's long-standing stance on Cyprus and supporting the approval of the UN-sponsored *Annan Plan*[315] in the twin referendums, submitted to the two Cypriot communities, that would be held on 24 April 2004, which resulted in a strong approval by Turkish Cypriots, with 64.9 per cent in favor, as well as in an overwhelmingly rejection of the plan from the Greek Cypriots, whose 75.8 per cent voted against[316]- Turkey was able to position itself as a mediator between the West and the Muslim Middle East, thus enhancing its credibility and leading, at the *Brussel Summit* in December 2004, to get granted the status of candidate, and to begin EU accession negotiations on 3 October 2005.[317]

The AKP's pro-Western orientation also included the maintenance of strategic relations with both the United States and Israel, despite these countries being considered ideological adversaries by Turkish Islamists. Indeed, the party managed the inherent contradictions of this pragmatic approach through an unofficial division of responsibilities: senior politicians and technocrats with diplomatic expertise, led by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül[318], and Economy Minister Ali Babacan, directed foreign policy; while Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan focused on domestic governance.[319]

This pro-Western orientation was also met with support from Turkey's traditional Western allies. For the liberal intelligentsia in both Turkey and Europe, the AKP was seen as a potential catalyst for historic reconciliation between Islam and Europe through liberal democratization. Bush administration - notwithstanding Turkish parliament rejection of a motion allowing the deployment of American troops on Turkish soil for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 – also promoted Turkey under the AKP as a moderate alternative to radical Islam in the context of

---

[314] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p p. 247

[315] See chapter 2, p. 21 for the plan's specific

[316] Cyprus Mail. (2016, December 29). *The peace processes: 2004 Annan Plan*. Cyprus Mail.

[317] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy.*

[318] Who became Foreign Minister on 14 March 2003 once Recep Tayyip Erdoğan entered parliament and was able to assume the premiership, after the ending of a political ban.

[319] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 248

the US-led war on terror. And both the EU and the U.S. supported the Turkish government when it faced the threat of a military intervention in April 2007[320], to protect secularism, after nominating Gül as its presidential candidate, contrary to the preferences of the military leadership.[321]

However, Turkey's European journey was once again hampered by the EU's unilateral decision to admit Cyprus within the Union on 1 May 2004, implicitly recognizing the Greek Cypriot government[322] as the solo representative authority of the island, while leaving the Northern TRNC outside EU law and without international recognition[323]. Indeed, despite the early enthusiasm, Turkey's European pathway quickly revealed its limitations. In fact, accession negotiations stalled immediately after 2005 both because of domestic struggles among Turkish interest groups, and political obstacles at EU level related to the unresolved Cyprus issue and the vetoes imposed by certain European capitals – such as Paris, where President Jacques Chirac referred the ultimate decision to a public referendum holding that the wide French public was contrary to Turkey's admission[324]. Moreover, once integrated, the Republic of Cyprus soon began blocking meaningful steps toward integration. This furtherly fueled opposition and mistrust toward the EU, which in the following years worsened when it coupled with democratic backsliding.[325]

3.2 2007-2011: Domestic Consolidation and the Rise of Strategic Depth

After securing a second general election victory on 22 July 2007, the AKP facilitated Gül's election as president in August, breaking the military's veto power; and amended the Constitution through a referendum to allow for popular election of future presidents instead of by parliament. After narrowly avoiding closure by the Constitutional Court for alleged anti-secular activities[326]

---

[320] Villelabeitia, I. (2009, May 8). *Ex-Turkish army chief says "e-coup" justified*. Reuters.

[321] *Ibid.*

[322] European Parliament. (2004, March). *Legislative resolution on the application by the Republic of Cyprus to become a member of the European Union*. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 64 E, 365

[323] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy.*

[324] Gentleman, A. (2004, October 2). *French public given veto on Turkey's EU membership*. *The Guardian*.

[325] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy.*

[326] In March 2008, the Constitutional Court opened a case to ban the AKP, accusing it of being a focal point of anti-secular activities. In July 2008, the Court narrowly decided not to close the party: 6 votes for closure, 5 against, 7 required.

in 2008[327], the party supported two highly politicized court case again alleged coup plotters: in 2008, the Ergenekon trials[328], where allegedly a clandestine ultra-nationalist network was charged plotting to overthrow the government; an in 2010, the Balyoz (Sledgehammer) case, in which senior military officers were accused of preparing a coup in 2003[329]. The cases were initiated by Gülenist prosecutors, police officers, and newspaper and resulted in widespread detentions and purges targeting thousands of secular nationalists, Kemalist, and Eurasianist opponents of the governing coalition within the military, state bureaucracy, and civil society. These actions were often justified by charges that were at least partially fabricated. In September 2010, the AKP achieved another political victory through a constitutional referendum that restructured the judiciary and increased the power of the legislative and executive branches over judicial appointments[330]. The combination of mass incarcerations and constitutional amendments allowed the government to consolidate its control over the state apparatus by appointing its allies, including numerous Gülenists, to key positions.[331]

During this period the party developed sufficient political and institutional confidence to address the regional geopolitical vacuum created by a Europe in difficulty, due to the financial crisis, and a United States in retreat. Notably, Turkey's European momentum ended due to widespread public opposition to Turkish membership in the European Union, which coupled with the economic crisis, led the EU to adopt a more inward-looking stance. Concurrently, Barack Obama's election as U.S. president marked the beginning of a period characterized by the American reluctance to intervene in international affairs. Indeed, while Obama tried to repair relations with the Muslim world, his general foreign policy was characterized by a cautious and pragmatic approach that sought to disengage from the costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and avoided new large-scale military implications in the Middle East.[332] This willingness was made explicit in May 2011, when he declared that "America will be judged not just by what we do in the region, but also what we don't do"[333]. Also reiterated two years later referring to the Syrian

---

[327] de Bendern, P. (2008, July 31). *Turkish AK Party court victory is double-edged sword*. Reuters.

[328] Butler, D. (2008, October 20). *Turkish court starts hearing high-profile coup case*. Reuters.

[329] Cutler, D. (2013, October 9). *Factbox: What was Turkey's 'Sledgehammer' trial?* Reuters.

[330] Aydinli, P. (2010, May 7). *Turkish government pushes reforms towards referendum*. Reuters

[331] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 249

[332] Nelson, M. (n.d.). *Barack Obama: Foreign affairs*. Miller Center

[333] Obama, B. H. (2011, May 19). *Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary.

crisis when he declared that "[he] will not put American boots on the ground in Syria. I will not pursue an open-ended action like Iraq or Afghanistan"[334]. However, This Western disengagement enabled the AKP to pursue, pragmatically, a more assertive foreign policy in regions outside the Western sphere.[335]

AKP gradually started redirecting its focus towards other regions, such as the Middle East, Africa and, to a lesser extent, Central Asia. With the goal to diversify trade relations and reshape Turkey's image as a global actor. This shift was facilitated by the emergence of new stakeholders into the foreign policy-making environment, which expanded beyond the traditional dominance of diplomats, the military, and intelligence circles. The new ruling apparatus increasingly incorporated business elites, philanthropic organizations, academics, and humanitarian agencies, thus widening the extent of Ankara's external engagement.[336]

The objective of this reorientation was to align the AKP's Islamic conservatism with the dynamics of neoliberal globalization, thus positioning Turkey as a model able to counter radicalism in the Middle East. Indeed, when the AKP achieved power, Turkey was in the middle of a highly competitive regional environment, also marked by disputes with neighbors such as Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Iran, and Armenia. Within this context, the party pursued the scope of transforming Turkey into an economic powerhouse, and to position Ankara as a mediator in regional disputes, and to improve historically strained relations, in order to create new business opportunities. A vision founded upon the doctrine of *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth)[337], conceptualized and promoted by *Ahmet Davutoğlu*, first as chief advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, from 2003 to 2009, then as Minister of Foreign Affairs, from 2009 to 2014, and finally as Prime minister between 2014 and 2016. This doctrine provided the rationale for Ankara's diplomatic activism and its renewed engagement with the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, while also progressively extending its interests to Africa.[338]

Indeed, deeply influenced by Neo-Ottomanism, Davutoğlu sought to turn Turkey from a peripheral actor towards a determinant actorness at the crossroads of several regions; and implied

---

[334] Obama, B. H. (2013, September 10). *Remarks by the President in address to the nation on Syria*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary.

[335] *Ibid.*

[336] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy*

[337] Davutoğlu, A. (2001). *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position]. İstanbul: Küre Yayınları.

[338] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy*

that by leveraging its historical and cultural connection with former Ottoman territories, Turkey could consolidate regional leadership and thus being acknowledged at the same rank of global powers. The doctrine was grounded upon five guiding principles[339].

The first one was keeping a *balance between security and democracy*. For Davutoğlu the endurance of Turkey's political order depended on the balance of these two elements. He believed that "if there is not a balance between security and democracy in a country, it may not have a chance to establish an area of influence in its environs. [...] The legitimacy of any political regime comes from its ability to provide security to its citizens; this security should not be at the expense of freedoms and human rights in the country."[340]. This meant that was required a governance model that neither sacrificed freedoms for stability nor ignored security in the name of liberalization.

The second one was maintaining *zero problems with neighbors*. One of the most cited aspects of Davutoğlu's approach, which reflected the idea of minimizing bilateral tensions. This principle reflected his conviction that Turkey's geography should be transformed from a source of insecurity into a strategic advantage by fostering a cooperative regional environment.[341]

The third one was the pursuing of a *proactive and preventive peace democracy*. That meant Turkey to be an order-instituting country which does not wait for crises to erupt but take initiatives to prevent conflicts and contribute to regional and global stability and does not act as a mere reactive actor. This proactive stance involved mediating between conflicting parties, promoting political dialogue, while taking advantage of Turkey's historical and cultural ties. [342]

The fourth one was the conducting of a *multidimensional foreign policy*. Meaning that "Turkey's relations with other global actors aim to be complementary, not in competition. Such a policy views Turkey's strategic relations with the United States through the two countries' bilateral ties and through NATO, and considers its membership process to the EU, its good neighborhood policy with Russia, and its synchronization policy in Eurasia as integral parts of a consistent policy that serves to complete each other"[343].

---

[339] Özkeçeci-Taner, B., & Akgül Açıkmeşe, S. (Eds.). (2023). *One hundred years of Turkish foreign policy (1923–2023): Historical and theoretical reflections*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 6.

[340] Davutoğlu, A. (2008). "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." *Insight Turkey,* p. 80

[341] *Ibid.*

[342] *Ivi,* p.81

[343] *Ivi, p. 82*

And practicing a *rhythmic diplomacy.* This meant a constant and visible Turkish presence in international forums and organizations - such as UN Security Council G20, OIC, NATO, Council of Europe, or African Union, where it had observer status - to ensure that Ankara's voice was consistently heard on global issues, in order to secure recognition as not merely a regional power but a global actor.[344]

During this period, Turkey was able to improve its relations with Syria and enter a phase of détente with Iran. In fact, the AKP's religiously conservative orientation created new opportunities for engagement with the Arab world through economic cooperation and strategic partnerships, reflecting Turkish policymakers' beliefs that would be better to be able to integrate both the Western and Islamic identities within a hybrid cultural framework for the benefit of Turkey itself, although them often raised concerns in Western capitals about a possible realignment. Soft power instruments such as Turkish television dramas, music, news broadcasting in foreign languages facilitated the pursuit of these interests regionally, while initiatives to strengthen trade, ease visa restrictions - but also the targeting of specific groups of countries within the UN General Assembly trying to exert influence upon them[345] - demonstrate Ankara's ambition to position itself as the center of a new regional order inspired by liberal principles. In this vision, Turkey would simultaneously enhance its credibility as reliable regional partner and sponsor its image as an efficient mediator in the eyes of the West.[346] Indeed, this multidimensional engagement culminated in Turkey's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2009-2010 rotation.[347]

However, the limits of Ankara's new regional activism soon became evident, also because of the increased influence of ideology and Islamist worldview among Turkey's decision makers, notably with the deterioration of relations with Israel[348] following the Gaza war of December 2008[349], notwithstanding the long-standing partnership. In fact, in 2009, Erdoğan clashed publicly with Israeli President *Shimon Peres* during an intense debate on Gaza at the *World Economic*

---

[344] *Ivi*, p. 82-83

[345] Özkeçeci-Taner, B., One *hundred years of Turkish foreign policy (1923–2023)* p. 6.

[346] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy*

[347] Özkeçeci-Taner, B., One *hundred years of Turkish foreign policy (1923–2023)* p. 6.

[348] But also addressing the treatment of Uighur in China, and siding by the controversial Muslim leaer Omar al-Bashad of Sudan

[349] Tran, M. (2008, December 29). *Israeli strikes on Gaza: What are the motives?* The Guardian.

Forum in Davos[350]. This incident, widely remembered as the *Davos Outburst* or the *one-minute event*, marked a turning point in bilateral ties.[351]

In fact, tensions further escalated after Israel refused Foreign Minister Davutoglu's request to visit Gaza and Ankara, in response, withdrew Israeli Air Force's participation to the October 2009 international air exercise. The crisis deepened when Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister *Daniel Ayalon* humiliated Turkish ambassador by seating him at a lower chair during an official meeting, causing harsh Turkish reactions. And culminated in the rupture of diplomatic ties after the 2010 *Mavi Marmara incident*, when Israeli military forces boarded upon a humanitarian Turkish non-governmental flotilla organized by the *Foundation for Human Rights, Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief,* directed to Gaza. A raid which left death nine civilians and many others wounded.[352] This sequence of events, on one hand allowed Erdoğan to present himself as the spokesperson of the oppressed and underlined the growing role of ideology in shaping AKP foreign policy, on the other hand represented the first major challenge of the *zero problems with neighbors* principle.[353]

Indeed, Turkey's regional stance, started to be oriented on a value basis, that is conferring more importance to justice, democracy, and solidarity with popular movements principles rather than pragmatic considerations of security and economics[354], but also advocating for Muslim interests in international politics, as was then evident during the political uprisings that affected the Arab world between 2011-2013.[355]

By the late 2010s Erdoğan's assertive approach and spontaneous interventions began to influence Turkish foreign policy, although the foreign policy agenda was still dominated by Davutoğlu's doctrine. During this period, the government sought to increase its control over the foreign affairs bureaucracy and achieved partial success. Erdoğan criticized senior diplomats and retired ambassadors who opposed his foreign policy decisions, while the foreign ministry began

---

[350] Associated Press. (2009, January 29). *WRAP Turkish PM leaves stage after clash with moderator on Gaza debate* [Video]. YouTube.

[351] Özkeçeci-Taner, B., One *hundred years of Turkish foreign policy (1923–2023)* p. 6.

[352] *Ibid.*

[353] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy.*

[354] Ülgen, S. (2011, November 15). *Turkey's "Zero Problems" Problem*. Project Syndicate.

[355] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy.*

appointing non-career individuals as ambassadors and later assigning them to permanent positions within the foreign service, many of whom were followers of Fethullah Gullen.[356]

3.3 2011-2016: From Arab Spring Optimism to Domestic Crisis and Regional Isolation

Consolidation of Power and the Arab Spring Engagement

Following the general elections of June 2011, the AKP secured its third consecutive victory, winning 49.8% of the vote and 327 seats out of 550 members in the Grand National Assembly. Erdoğan consolidate control over the ruling party, and the governing coalition further established its dominance over state institutions. Notably, within the AKP, the initially pluralistic structure transitioned towards a more centralized organization, which placed Erdoğan as the primary authority. Indeed, the Prime Minister was keen to select loyalist candidates, also excluding individuals perceived as overly independent or closely aligned with Gül – who had a more moderate and diplomatically minded approach, whose differences with Erdoğan's orientation began to surface before 2011 elections. This electoral victory also represented the consolidation of government power over military-bureaucratic establishment, and the concurrent steady economic growth in the context of a global financing downturn, contributed to heighten the sense of confidence and ideological assertiveness among Erdoğan and Davutoğlu which defined the party's approach during the early stages of the Arab Spring uprisings.[357]

Relying on its popular support and institutional strength, the ruling party ended its informal alliance with domestic liberal intelligentsia, that removed the liberal democratic reformation orientation of the government's program that characterized the early AKP period and rather substituted it with a new rhetoric revealing the government's intentions to reshape Turkey's state and society according to a Sunni Turkish identity.[358]

---

[356] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 250

[357] *Ivi,* p. 251

[358] *Ibid.*

In fact, if 2002 program EU accession at the center of Turkey's foreign policy vision, defining it as both a strategic objective, a tool for democratization, transparency, and reform, and a pathway to align Turkey with universal values to dismantle authoritarian legacies and the role of military in politics; the 2011 program reflected a very different orientation. Notwithstanding EU membership was still described as a "strategic goal", the 2011 document stressed that Turkey would pursue reforms "first and foremost because they are in our nation's interest", reducing EU process to a complementary framework.[359]

Moreover, a new self-confident discourse of autonomy and regional leadership emerged from the pledged program. It depicted Turkey as a "guiding country" with the responsibility to act as stabilizer in its neighborhood, implementing policies of "zero problem with neighbors" and "rhythmic diplomacy" as rooted in Davutoglu's doctrine, but definitely different from the more cautious and integrationist tone of 2002, and rather highlighting the willingness to extend Turkey's geopolitical depth to Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.[360]

During this period, conservative social and educational policies and high-profile construction projects, including the construction of the world's largest mosque on Istanbul's highest hill; and the elevation of the *Diyanet* (Presidency of Religious Affairs), established in 1924 to maintain state control over religion, which became a central component of the government's religious nationalist strategy, with substantial increases in its budget, personnel, and activities domestically and internationally.[361]

Domestically, the implementation of a religious-nationalist hegemonic agenda, combined with the ruling party's increasing intolerance of pluralism and dissent, intensified tensions among secular Turks, Kurds, and Alevis. This escalation led to a cycle of violent protests and repression of civil liberties.[362] This period also showed a strong coalition between the AKP-core loyalists and Gülenists to capitalize over the military-bureaucratic control. However, the removal of this shared adversary gradually exposed their underlying differences and competing hegemonic ambitions.[363]

---

[359] Resmî Gazete. (2011, July 17). *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, issue 27997: TBMM Kararı 998 ve eki 61'inci Hükûmet Programı [Grand National Assembly Decision No. 998 and annexed Program of the 61st Government]

[360] *Ibid.*

[361] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 251

[362] Hasan, M. (2012, June 10). *In Turkey the right to free speech is being lost*. *The Guardian*.

[363] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 252

After an initial period of hesitation, Turkey actively supported the Arab Spring uprisings. They viewed the collapse of secular dictatorships and the rise of Islamist movements as an opportunity to reshape the region according to Turkey's vision. Abandoning the "zero problems" rationale, Ankara provided strong backing to *Muslim Brotherhood*-affiliated groups in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria.[364] The support for this movement was determined by a combination of ideological, strategic, and geopolitical factors. In fact, the AKP leadership saw in the Brotherhood a movement that had its own background and trajectory: same roots in Sunni Islamism and willing to operate through elections and democratic mechanism. It represented a perfect occasion to replicate the "Turkish model" across the Arab world, thus a way to extend Ankara's influence, presenting Turkey as the natural leader of a new Sunni democratic wave.[365] However, by embracing the Brotherhood's cause, Turkey deteriorated its relationship with Gulf monarchies, that is Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which feared an electoral Islamist regime which may undermine their hereditary rule, and with Egypt. Indeed, despite the initial strengthening of the ties after the success of the Brotherhood in Egypt, under President Morsi, his overthrow after the 2013 military coup led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi determined a sensible downgrading of diplomatic relations, as it will be furtherly discussed in the next chapter.[366]

Western governments, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, preferred Turkey – a constitutionally secular and procedurally democratic Muslim majority nation integrated with Western institutions – to emerge as the primary beneficiary of the Arab Spring, rather than Iran or Saudi Arabia. As a result, they overlooked the decline of democracy and civil liberties within Turkey and actively promoted it as a model for the region.[367] In 2012, after a five-hour meeting with then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Davutoğlu described US-Turkey relations as being in their "golden age".[368]

From regional Crisis to Coup Attempt

[364] *Ibid.*

[365] Giannotta, V., *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*.

[366] Robinson, K. (2023, July 11). *Turkey's growing foreign policy ambitions*. Council on Foreign Relations, p.6

[367] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 252

[368] The Economist. (2012, February 25). *Turkey's political in-fighting: Erdogan at bay*. *The Economist*.

The International recognition, together with the domestic achievements of the AKP, increased the confidence of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu as they advanced their political agenda. However, this increased confidence led to the neglect or minimization of significant threats to Turkey's stability, including escalating sociopolitical tensions domestically but also rapidly worsening bilateral relations with regional actors such as Syria, Iran, and Russia. These tensions escalated almost simultaneously after mid-2013.[369]

Indeed, after mid-2013 the political environment shifted against the AKP's Islamist allies. In Tunisia, Muslim Brotherhood-backed movements and governments were obliged to form alliances with secular parties. In Egypt these groups were overthrown and suppressed. In Libya and Syria, they were either marginalized or radicalized by violent jihadi organizations.[370]

Notably, the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 quickly destabilized Turkey's southern border, transforming it from a relative secure area into a zone of significant insecurity. Initially, Turkey's government tried not to be involved into the conflict and, through a "zero problems with neighbors" policy, only tried to induce Bashar al-Assad to undertake reforms. However, as the conflict escalated and the regime chose repression over compromise, Turkey – which found a natural affinity with the Syrian opposition dominated by Sunni groups - quickly began advocating for the removal of the dictator and viewing the Syrian conflict as a direct security issue, resulting in the rapid re-securitization of Turkey's borders with Syria, Iraq, and Iran[371]. Moreover, the porosity of the borders caused the influx of millions of refugees which introduced substantial humanitarian and social challenges within Turkey, as well as foreign fighters and radical groups.[372]

These external threats, coupled with the emerging, internally, of competing political groups, such as Kemalist, Eurasianists, and Islamists, made AKP gradually shifting its priorities towards a more oppressive domestic control – consisting in assuming control over media organizations, removing military personnel considered dissident, and prosecuting and imprisoning critics[373] - largely contradicting the principle of balance between security and democracy, and revealing inconsistent with what the government advocated in its external relations.[374] Most

---

[369] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 252-253

[370] *Ivi, p. 253*

[371] Letsch, C. (2012, April 25). *Tough times for Turks on border with Syria*. *The Guardian*.

[372] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 253

[373] Robinson, K. (2023, July 11). *Turkey's growing foreign policy ambitions*, p.4

[374] Özkeçeci-Taner, B., & Akgül Açıkmeşe, S. (Eds.). (2023). *One hundred years of Turkish foreign policy (1923–2023): Historical and theoretical reflections*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 7-8

notably, this was evident in the case of the suppression of Gezi Park protests in 2013, when a small environmental sit-in in Istanbul against the redevelopment of a public park was violently dispersed by the police, triggering nationwide demonstrations that soon turned into a broader protest against authoritarianism, restrictions on freedoms, and the government's growing centralism[375].

Following the Islamic State (IS) capture of Mosul in 2014 and a series of deadly terror attacks in European cities, Western priorities shifted from removing the Assad regime to defeating IS in Syria and Iraq. In this framework, Ankara's reluctance to prevent jihadi fighters from crossing into Syria - initially justified through the difficulty of patrolling 900-kilometer frontier, then appeared more as an Ankara's attempt of turning a blind eye to jihadist movements in order to weaken Assad and contrast Kurdish - combined with the authoritarian inward turn, undermined Turkey's democratic image, and altered relations with the West. Indeed, Turkey's was increasingly perceived not as a regional model but as an illiberal regime and facilitator of violent jihadism[376].

U.S.-Turkey relationship further deteriorated when Washington formed a strategic alliance with the Syrian *Kurdish People's Protection Units* (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG), a Kurdish militia that formed in 2011 during the Syrian war to defend Kurdish people, which the United States identified as an effective force against the IS. In contrast, the Turkish government considered the YPG to be an extension of the PKK, with which conflict persisted despite a fragile ceasefire and ongoing negotiations since early 2013. However, the intensification of the IS-Kurdish conflict in Syria and Iraq in 2014 exacerbated sociopolitical tensions between AKP and Kurdish population in Turkey, ultimately leading to the collapse of the peace process and a new outbreak of the conflict after mid-2015.[377]

The military coup in Egypt against President Mohammad Morsi, and the subsequent violent suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013 intensified Ankara's sence of insecurity. Namely, Erdoğan and his supporters perceived the limited Western response to the Egyptian coup, especially when compared to the extensive coverage and criticism of the Turkish government's management of the Gezi protests, and argued about Western double standards and unreliability.[378] This perception contributed to increasing distrust between the US, EU, and the Turkish

[375] Martin, G. (2013, June 3). *Turmoil in Istanbul: Guy Martin at Turkey's Gezi Park Protests. Time*

[376] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 253.

[377] *Ivi,* p. 253-254

[378] Burch, J. (2013, July 19). *Turkey's Erdogan slams world's 'double standards' on Egypt*. Reuters.

government. Which was reflected in Erdoğan's increasingly confrontational anti-Western rhetoric.[379]

Moreover, as Turkey's relations with Western countries deteriorated, its already tense relationship with Russia – because Moscow was Assad's key political and weapon-provider backer, and also engaged military in the conflict targeting with airstrikes Syrian Turkmen groups from September 2015 - worsened into a crisis after the Turkish military shot down a Russian fighter jet near the Turkish-Syrian border in November 2015.[380] In response, the Russian government suspended all military and intelligence cooperation with Turkey, implemented trade sanctions on Turkish goods and businesses, and accused the AKP government of collaborating with IS.[381]

Multiple domestic factors undermined Turkish government's capacity to adapt to rapidly evolving international dynamics. During this time, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu consolidated control over both the party and the state. Erdoğan became Turkey's first popularly elected president, winning in the first round with 51.8% of the vote, while Davutoğlu assumed the role of prime minister in August 2014.[382] A landmark moment that Erdoğan himself framed as the beginning of a *New Turkey*[383]. That is, the overcome of an *Old Turkey*, defined by military tutelage, rigid secularism, and fragile coalition politics; but also, implicitly a concentration of power in the presidency, a greater role for religion in public life, and an assertive regional posture.[384]

The centralization of institutional authority and the suppression of dissent within the party and foreign affairs bureaucracy eroded the effectiveness of checks and balances as well as advisory mechanisms. In particular, Davutoğlu persisted in advancing his vision for a neo-Ottoman Middle East despite clear evidence of its failure. Moreover, Turkey's institutions and democratic processes experienced near paralysis due to the raising power struggle between the AKP and the Gülenists. In fact, a criminal investigation led by Gülenist prosecutors in December 2013 implicated senior AKP officials and members of Erdoğan's family in corruption, including violations of international

---

[379] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 254

[380] Thompson, M. (2015, November 24). *Turkish Downing of Russian Jet Complicates ISIS Fight*. *Time*

[381] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 254

[382] *Ivi,* p. 254-255

[383] Giannotta, V., *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*.

[384] Associated Press. (2014, August 28). *Erdoğan declares his election is "day Turkey is born from its ashes." The Guardian*.

sanctions on Iran.[385] Consequently, the government responded by suppressing the investigation and rapidly removing prosecutors and police officers linked to the Hizmet Movement.[386]

The collapse of the intra-Islamist alliance, which had constituted the foundation of the AKP's coalition since 2002, produces significant consequences. By expelling or marginalizing Gülen sympathizers, including long-standing officials, and by appointing a new younger generation of loyalists, Erdoğan consolidated his control over the party. Moreover, he initiated the formation of a new coalition which included the far-right *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Action Party, MHP), Gülen's rivals within the broader Naqshbandi Sufi religious order; and secular nationalist opponents of Erdoğan who had been imprisoned during the coup trials but were released in early 2014 following reversal of their convictions, many of them prior pursued by Gülenists.[387]

The internal conflict resulted in a significant division within Turkey's conservative Muslim community and extended into international politics. The Hizmet Movement's business and political networks abroad, which had previously supported the AKP, began to operate as an anti-Erdoğan lobby. In response, the AKP government designated Hizmet as a terrorist organization in 2015 and intensified diplomatic, lobbying, and intelligence operations both directly and through institutions such as the Diyanet to suppress Gülenist activities overseas. This conflict ultimately escalated into the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, allegedly orchestrated by Gülenist officers facing dismissal from the military after an extensive crack down by Erdoğan. [388]

3.4 2016-2020: Post-Coup Realignment and the Militarization of Turkish Foreign Policy

The period following the 2016 coup marks the onset of a new phase characterized by increased activism in foreign policy, shaped by the worldview and interests of the new ruling coalition as well as President Erdogan's pragmatic approach to political survival. More precisely,

---

[385] Uras, U. (2013, December 24). *Turkish probe marks AKP-Gülen power struggle. Al Jazeera English;* Finkel, A. (2013, December 26). *Turkey's Erdoğan replaces 10 ministers*. *Financial Times*.

[386] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 254-255

[387] *Ivi,* p. 255

[388] *Ivi,* p. 255-256

this period began not with the July 2016 coup attempt but a few months before, with the replacement of Davutoğlu by Binali Yıldırım, a known Erdoğan loyalist, as prime minister. Public speculation regarding Erdoğan's dissatisfaction with Davutoğlu's leadership had circulated since the AKP lost its parliamentary majority in the June 2015 general election. The party later regained its majority through a repeat vote in November. However, Erdoğan's supporters openly questioned Davutoğlu's loyalty - who tried to preserve a degree of autonomy in the conduct of government and party affairs, that inevitably clashed with Erdoğan's determination to consolidate power and transition to a presidential system - criticized for his connections with the US government and for Turkey's problematic involvement in Syria.[389]

Davutoğlu's departure solidified Erdoğan's personal control over the AKP and marked the rise of an anti-Western nationalist alliance within the Turkish government. This alliance actively supported widespread purges and detentions of suspected opponents which affected all sectors of public life during the state of emergency following the coup. MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli became Erdoğan's key coalition partner and supported major constitutional reforms that shifted Turkey from a parliamentary system to a powerful executive presidency, after a referendum held in April 2017, moving the country toward a more authoritarian, personalized regime, also abolishing the office of the prime minister.[390] In exchange, MHP representatives secured privileged positions within state institutions, particularly the police, and succeeded in advancing their anti-Kurdish, anti-liberal, and militarist agenda on government policy.[391]

Secular nationalist opponents of Erdoğan, including Eurasianists, also joined the new coalition. This alliance significantly influenced Turkey's foreign policy direction, which did not seem guided by a coherent doctrine or set of principles, but rather certain tendencies and pragmatic patterns, that prioritized the expansion of Turkey's military and diplomatic presence.[392] Indeed, as relations with the United States and the European Union continued to decline, also because of the lack of solidarity from the Western allies after the attempted coup, Turkey accelerated efforts to improve ties with Russia, where President Putin was the first foreign head of state offering "unconditional support" after the failed coup attempt.[393] Erdoğan issued a public apology for the

[389] *Ivi*, p. 256

[390] Robinson, K. (2023, July 11). *Turkey's growing foreign policy ambitions*. p.4

[391] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*. p. 256-257

[392] Özkeçeci-Taner, B., (2023). *One hundred years of Turkish foreign policy (1923–2023),* p. 8

[393] *Ibid.*

downing of the Russian jet, attributing the incident to rogue Gülenist officers.[394] Subsequently, Russia removed sanctions on Turkish businesses. In 2017, Putin and Erdoğan met eight times and finalized a $2.5 billion agreement for the sale of a Russian S-400 missile system to Turkey, the first time a NATO member made such a purchase.[395] In response, the U.S. removed Ankara from *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter* (JSF) *program*, blocked a planned sale of 100 F-35 combat aircrafts, and imposed sanctions under the *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)* – a 2017 sanctions law initially targeting Russia[396], as a consequence of Moscow's interference in the 2016 U.S. elections; its annexation of Crimea in 2014; and its involvement in Ukraine and Syria; and eventual other countries which engage in significant defense transactions with them - on its defense sector.[397] This episode was representative of the trajectory the new Turkish foreign policy was taking: increasingly personalized and strategically oriented towards more autonomy, but still constrained from its structural dependence on its Western allies.

The rapprochement with Russia led to a significant shift in Turkey's Syria policy. At the beginning of 2017, setting aside longstanding rivalry and mutual accusations, Ankara participated in negotiations, the *Astana Process,* with Russia and Iran regarding Syria's future. Then the AKP government tried to limit the influence of US-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria and, supported by Russia, the Turkish military and the *Free Syrian Army* (FSA), a force of defected soldiers fighting Assad and representing the moderate opposition to his regime, launched ground operations in northern Syria in 2017 (*Euphrate Shield)*, 2018 (*Olive Branch)*, 2019 (*Peace Spring),* and 2020 (*Spring Shield)*, seizing substantial territory from both the YPG and ISIS.[398]

Turkey's military operations in northern Syria marked the onset of a more assertive and confrontational approach in its foreign policy, moving away from traditional soft power strategies, and focusing instead on significant investment in the national defense sector. As a result, Turkey's arms imports declined by 48 per cent between 2015 and 2019, while domestic defense companies like *ASELSAN* and *Turkish Aerospace Industries* became prominent global exporters.[399]

---

[394] News Agencies (2016, June 27). *Erdogan 'sorry' for downing of Russian jet*. Al Jazeera English.

[395] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 257

[396] But also Iran and North Korea

[397] Giannotta, (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*

[398] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 257-258

[399] *Ivi,* p. 258

In this period, echoing the tensions of the 1990s, Turkey nearly entered into open conflict with Greece and, by extension, the European Union over contested maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean. The dispute was the consequence of overlapping claims to *exclusive economic zones (*EEZs) and the right to conduct offshore gas explorations in areas around Cyprus and near the island of Kastellorizo, which Ankara argued unfairly limited Turkey's continental shelf. The crisis escalated in 2020, when Turkey deployed the research vessel *Oruç Reis* to conduct seismic surveys in contested waters, leading Greece to place its navy on high alert. [400]

At the same time, Turkey's more assertive regional standing extended in Libya where Ankara intervened militarily, by providing advanced drones and military advisers, in early 2020 to support the UN-recognized *Government of National Accord* (GNA) against the forces of Khalifa Haftar's *Libyan National Army* (LNA), which was backed by Russia, Egypt, and the UAE.[401]

Similarly, in the South Caucasus, Turkey offered decisive assistance to Azerbaijan during the *Second Nagorno-Karabakh War* in the autumn of 2020. Ankara's support included the supply of *Bayraktar TB2 drones,* military training, and intelligence support, which played a critical role to uphold Azerbaijan's success against Armenian forces.[402] South Caucasus and Libyan interventions highlighted the limits of Ankara's cooperation with Russia which demonstrate tactical alignment in areas such as Syria, and different camps in other regions.[403]

Moreover, this pragmatic shift in Turkey's foreign policy led the AKP to abandon several Islamist priorities. For example, in 2016, Turkey and Israel resolved the six-year diplomatic impasse that began with the Israeli raid on a Turkish-led aid flotilla. During the early days of Donald Trump's first presidency, the Turkish government and pro-government media avoided public criticism of Trump's Islamophobic statements, and the travel ban on Muslims, in an effort to secure backing from the White House. Turkey also refrained from commenting on China's treatment of Uighur Turks and signed an extradition treaty that could facilitate the deportation o Uighurs from Turkey to China. Yet, Erdoğan's government initiated efforts to normalize relations with Egypt, indicating that even Ankara's longstanding support for the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members have found refuge in Turkey, may be subordinated to political pragmatism.[404]

---

[400] Al Jazeera. (2020, July 28). *Turkey pauses energy-exploration research in east Mediterranean*. *Al Jazeera English*.

[401] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 258

[402] *Ibid.*

[403] *Ibid.*

[404] *Ivi,* p. 258-259

3.5 2021-2024: The Normalization Agenda and Turkey's Bid for Multipolar Alignment

Recent global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and ongoing violence in Gaza, have determined Ankara to adjust its regional and international strategy. These crises revealed Turkey's structural vulnerabilities, including reliance on global supply chains, dependence on foreign capital, and exposure to regional instability. In response, Turkish policymakers have initiated a new phase of regional politics focused on normalizing relations with former adversaries, strengthening again soft power, and positioning Turkey as a balancing actor between competing blocs.[405]

In 2021, Ankara initiated a policy of rapprochement and de-escalation with states it had previously confronted after the Arab uprisings. Policymakers pursued a normalization agenda, designed to end regional isolation, reduce economic repercussions from past confrontations, and foster Ankara's integration into new diplomatic and financial networks.[406] The first positive developments came with the UAE in November 2021, when Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed visited Ankara.[407] This high-profile encounter paved the way for significant investment pledges by Emirati sovereign wealth funds, and closer dialogue on regional conflicts, and by early 2022, relations seem not only stabilized but also open for new economic opportunities.[408]

Similarly, with Saudia Arabia, where tensions had peaked after the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul and Ankara's subsequent efforts to make Riyad accountable. Erdoğan's state visit to Jeddah in April 2022 signaled the official end of the rivalry. And, beyond restoring political dialogue, this rapprochement included efforts to coordinate on regional competition in Libya and to attract Saudi investment into the Turkish economy. [409]

In parallel, Ankara also sought to stabilize relations with Israel, which constantly deteriorate because of the repeated crises over Gaza, Turkish support for Hamas, and Erdoğan's

---

[405] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*.

[406] Balta, E. (2024, July 9). *Normalizing transactionalism: Turkish foreign policy after the 2023 elections*. Middle East Institute.

[407] Al Jazeera. (2021, November 23). *UAE crown prince to meet Erdogan for talks to 'improve relations'. Al Jazeera*.

[408] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*.

[409] *Ibid.*

criticism of Israeli policies.[410] In August 2022, the two countries announced the restoration of full diplomatic relations. This move opened the door to renewed cooperation in energy and trade, but this fragile détente collapsed again on 7 October 2023, when Turkey re-embraced its full support for Palestinian nationalism and condemned Israeli military actions.[411]

Perhaps the most symbolic development was the opening of the dialogue with Armenia, a state with which Turkey had no diplomatic ties since 1993 due to the first Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which persisted until the second conflict in 2020. In January 2022, special envoys from Ankara and Yerevan met in Moscow to discuss normalization. Since then, a new confidence-building process has become, and though full normalization has not been achieved yet, a departure from decades of hostility can be clearly remarked.[412]

Turkey also sought to restore relations with NATO and the European Union. Notably, to overcome the consequences of the 2019 purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system, which caused the U.S. CAATSA sanctions and the exclusion from the F-35 program. This cleavage worsened when Turkey used its veto power to delay the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO in 2022-2023. Eventually, after negotiations with Washington, which included an agreement to supply Turkey with *F-16 Block 70 fighter jet upgrades*, Ankara approved the enlargements. Nevertheless, CAATSA sanctions remained in place. [413]

Nowadays, while Turkey is dealing with several geopolitical challenges, it is also at a critical juncture in defining for its future long-term strategy. On 2 September 2024, the AKP announced that Turkey had formally applied for membership in BRICS. The group, which was originally composed by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE, thus widening its geographic and economic scope. Moreover, Ankara's move represents not only a pragmatic step to broaden partnership but also a symbolic shift in its foreign policy, likely manifesting the willingness for greater independence from the traditional Western security and economic frameworks.[414] This application reflects Ankara's ambition to re-establish itself as a connector between the Global North and South, leveraging its

[410] Goksedef, E. (2024, January 2). *What is behind Turkey's staunch support for Hamas in Gaza? BBC News*

[411] *Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule.*

[412] *Ibid.*

[413] Giannotta, V., (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*.

[414] Aydın-Düzgit, S., Kutlay, M., & Keyman, E. F. (2025). *Strategic autonomy in Turkish foreign policy in an age of multipolarity: lineages and contradictions of an idea*, p. 3

geography, middle-power status, and multidimensional diplomacy. However, it has inevitably raised concerns among its Western partners, being the first NATO member state to seek for membership, since Russia and China constitute the main NATO's systemic rivals, and BRICS is overtly an emerging institutional platform designed to challenge the Western-dominated liberal international order.[415]

At the same time, Ankara's BRICS initiatives also reflect the intention to leverage in its relations with the European Union. Indeed, Turkey's EU accession process, negotiations on the modernization of the Customs Union and visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, remain effectively blocked, burdened by long-standing disputes over human rights, democratic backsliding, and the Cyprus issue. Thus, this application signals also Ankara's frustration with Brussels and the willingness to seek for alternative partnerships also as a mean to strengthen its negotiation position vis-à-vis the EU.[416]

Lastly, Turkey's turn towards BRICS should also be understood in the broader context of its deepening ties with China over the past decade. Indeed, since joining the *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)* in 2015, Ankara has gained access to non-Western fundings for important infrastructure projects, such as nuclear energy development, coal-fired power plants, and transportation networks. China has provided billions of dollars in loans since 2016, also supporting Turkey's fragile financial system during periods of economic instability and, by 2021, has emerged as Turkey's largest source of imports.[417]

3.6 Ideology, Pragmatism, and the Personalization of Turkish Foreign Policy

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the international system transitioned from the triumph of liberalism of the early post-Cold War era to a period marked by volatility and unpredictability. This era has been defined by wars, occupations, revolutions, and state collapse in the Middle East, socioeconomic crises and populist recoil in the West, and the emergence of Russia and China as challengers to the Western-led liberal order. These global shifts have coincided with, and directly influenced, successive power struggles within the Turkish state. Initially, a coalition

[415] *Ibid.*

[416] *Ivi,* p. 3-4

[417] *Ivi, p.*5

led by the AKP, including the Gülenists, dismantled the control of the secular nationalist military and senior bureaucracy. Subsequently, this coalition experienced an internal and more destructive conflict, and the intersection of these domestic and international developments has contributed to significant instability and unpredictability in Ankara's foreign policy.[418]

Transformation within both the state and the ruling party have fundamentally altered the mechanisms of Turkish foreign policy-making. The gradual replacement of the military-bureaucratic establishment by the AKP as the primary policy actor coincided with the party's subordination to President Erdoğan. As a consequence, Turkish foreign policy shifted from a professionalized, bureaucratic process with limited personal or popular influence on a de-institutionalized system dominated by Erdoğan's personalized control. However, this personalization had made his personal and political interests, as well as those of his family, indistinguishable from national interests, and turned the personal power struggle between Erdoğan and Gülen a central state crisis.[419]

Contrary to the common belief that the AKP's Islamism has distanced Turkey from the West, ideological factors seem to have played a limited role in shaping Turkey's geopolitical orientation. Indeed, the United States and the European Union supported the AKP's efforts to dismantle the influence of Turkey's secular military into the 2010s, and the US-Turkey reached it so-called "golden age" period during the peak of AKP's Islamist policies between 2011 and 2013, when Turkey was promoted and promoted itself as a regional model. In contrast, the most turbulent period in Turkey's relations with Western states occurred after this phase, when President Erdoğan and the AKP alliance, which this time included ultranationalist, shifted away from established Islamist positions in foreign policy.[420]

The variable influence of ideology and pragmatism in Turkish foreign policy can be attributed to decision makers' perceived security in their position of power. As their self-assurance increased, so did the influence of ideological consideration in policy formulation. That is, once they secured popular support and control over key state institutions, and perceived fewer domestic and international constraints, the leadership advanced an overtly Islamist vision for Turkey and the broader region. In contrast, periods of insecurity and perceived threats to political survival prompted a shift towards pragmatic policy choices and alliances aimed at consolidating power.

---

[418] Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*, p. 259

[419] *Ivi*, p. 261

[420] *Ibid.*

On one hand, Pragmatic policy-making and alliance building were most evident during the first AKP's tenure and after the 2016-coup. On the other hand, ideology was the primary driver of foreign policy between 2011 and 2013, while a blend of both approaches prevailed, with different nuances, from 2007 to 2011 and from 2013 to 2016.[421]

Moreover, the translation of pragmatism or ideology into policy outcomes has been influenced by the leadership style, political skills, and worldviews of the key AKP decision makers. For example, Gül's reconciliatory and diplomacy-based approach defined Turkey's foreign policy during his tenure as foreign minister and in the early years of his presidency. However, his less assertive style reduced his influence as more ambitious figures emerged. In fact, Davutoğlu, recognized as Turkey's intellectual strategist, interpreting the Arab Spring uprisings as an opportunity to fulfill Ankara's regional ambitions, shifted away from the cautious multilateralism of the "zero problems" policy he theorized, and prioritized regime change in Syria. And lastly, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has emerged as the primary architect of Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP, with his populist rhetoric and assertive diplomatic approach frequently interpreted as ideological commitment. He has consistently demonstrated the capacity to form and dissolve alliances and to alter policy options, while sustaining public support and consolidating authority within both the party and the state. His ongoing influence over Turkey's decision-making processes suggests that the country's foreign policy trajectory will likely remain unpredictable.[422]

In conclusion, recent times illustrate how Ankara has recalibrated its alliances, seeking to ease isolation, attract investments, and consolidate its role as a middle power. The BRICS application witnesses this dual strategy: on one side, there is a genuine effort to diversify partnerships in a multipolar system, also aspiring to play a role in the evolving global order; on the other, it is possibly a mean to leverage Turkey's position to obtain concessions from the EU and NATO, such as relief from sanctions, or renewed access to defense projects, financial support, and more flexibility on its domestic and regional policies.

[421] *Ivi*, p. 262

[422] *Ivi,* p. 263

Part III – Part III – Turkey and Egypt: Contesting Regional Primacy

Chapter 4 – Strategic Rivalry over Influence and Leadership in the Middle East

4.1 Introduction

Following decades of relative disengagement from the Middle East and North Africa, Turkey und the AKP ruling relaunched in the 2000s an assertive strategy aiming at projecting cultural, political, and economic influence across the region. This approach further intensified following the 2011 Arab uprisings, and created challenges for Egypt. Notably, it weakened the Egyptian military's status as the West's primary counterpart; undermined Cairo's central role as mediator and security guarantor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and diminished its ability to affect political and security dynamics in the neighboring states.[423]

This chapter traces the evolution of Turkish-Egyptian relations, showing how the two powers shifted from cooperation to confrontation and, more recently, to a cautious rapprochement. The analysis is organized in three different moments. First, it outlines the historical roots of competition, highlighting Cold War alignments and the divergent regional roles they were called to play which shaped their rivalry. Second, it includes both states withing the broader framework of the U.S. strategy, underlying how changing American priorities conditioned Ankara and Cairo's foreign policy choices. Last, it reconstructs the three key phases since 2011, the short alignment after the Arab Spring, the prolonged confrontation after the Egyptian coup, and the tentative of reconciliation from 2022 onward, through which we can describe the modern pathway of their relationship.

This organization, by merging historical background but also global influences with strong regional effect, provides a comprehensive conclusive framework which will let me to draw my final conclusions.

[423] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy from the Arab Spring to the Gaza crisis: Sub-imperialisms and regional order*. *International Politics*, p. 1-2

4.2 From Cold War Alignments to Contemporary Rivalry: The Historical Roots of Turkish–Egyptian Competition

Until the 1970s, relations between Egypt and Turkey were rather strained. In fact, Turkey, a NATO member since 1952, acted as a U.S.-aligned regional intermediary which constituted a barrier against Soviet influence, while Egypt, particularly under Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970), positioned itself as the leader of the Arab anti-imperialist camp tied to Moscow. This antagonism then gradually shifted into competition after President Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) realigned Egypt from the Soviet to the American sphere. Washington began to rely on Cairo after realizing that its established legacy of Arab leadership, developed under Nasser, allowed it to act as a central mediator in the Arab-Israeli peace process, notably after its 1979 treaty with Israel. In this role, Egypt could also present itself as a guarantor of regional stability in a way that neither Turkey nor the United States could manage alone. However, Egypt's capacity to act as a key regional actor inevitably depended on the resilience of its authoritarian regime, which made Cairo's foreign policy consistently prioritizing security concerns.[424]

Turkey despite the recurrent claims that it has been drifting away from its traditional alliances, still remains deeply tied to Europe and U.S. trade and financial system since its NATO accession. By the early 21st century, Ankara has considerable material and non-material resources that confer to Turkey the ability to project influence through economic, political, and military means not only in the Middle East and North Africa but also in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia.[425] By contrast, Egypt - though from the late 1970s onward has been part of the Washington's security order in the Middle East and has benefitted from significant U.S. military assistance, as well as financial support from Gulf states - it is often depicted as a power in decline and limited by deep socioeconomic fragility. Indeed, by 2024, poverty officially affects at least 30 percent of the population; external debt has risen to around $160.6 billion by 2024; and the state misses a unifying ideological legitimacy since it abandoned Arab nationalism and signed peace with Israel. Moreover, foreign reserves are primarily directed to finance its debt, leaving Cairo with little

[424] *Ivi, p.6-7*

[425] Fouskas, V. (2022). *Economic drivers of Turkey's foreign policy and the issue of "strategic autonomy" (sub-imperialism)* Yaşar University, Center for Asia–Turkey Studies (CATS), p. 9

capacity to wield economic leverage regionally in the way that Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, or Turkey can.[426]

However, one dimension in which Egypt can easily compete is its military and security capacity, which is a factor that inevitably places Egypt as a key regional power. In fact, Egypt possesses the largest army in the Arab world and, between 2011 and 2025, has consistently ranked among the top 20 militaries worldwide. The size of its military resources is difficult to calculate precisely: while the official defense budget stood at $3.3 billion in 2019-20, the country also benefits from $1.3 billion in annual U.S. military aid. Moreover, the whole defense-industrial complex is estimated at between $3.32 and $6.64 billion according to President Sisi. On the other side, critics argue that this defense sector is oversized and of limited utility, given the lack of direct territorial threats, its inadequacy against unconventional challenges, and the country's economic weakness. Nevertheless, if considered in its partnership with other Western-oriented regional states, particularly the Gulf monarchies, it reacquires political significance.[427]

Indeed, Egypt's position as a regional intermediary power has developed in parallel with the rise of the *Gulf Cooperation Council* (GCC), founded in 1981, as the Arab world's financial hub, and cannot be completely understood without considering its close ties to Saudi Arabia, and the other Gulf and Western-partner monarchies. In fact, the foundation of the Cairo-Riyadh relationship has traditionally been the consequence of a negotiation: Gulf aids and investments in exchange for the assurance of Egyptian military protection. However, whether Egypt is both capable and willing to fulfill this role is debatable. For instance, Cairo showed reluctance to contribute significantly to the Saudi- and UAE- led intervention in Yemen in 2015, and its reaction to a serious existential threat against a Gulf monarchy remains uncertain. Yet, Egypt did provide considerable military assistance in 1991 Gulf War, and in 2018 President Sisi explicitly declared that the Egyptian army would defend Gulf states if threatened.[428] This interdependence has been institutionalized through joint military exercises since the 1980s, such as the *Tabuk drills*. Thus, even though Gulf states exert considerable financial leverage over Cairo, their reliance on Egyptian military support inevitably provides Egypt with significant influence.[429]

---

[426] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 7*

[427] *Ivi, p. 7-8*

[428] Reuters. (2018, November 4). *Egypt's Sisi says army will defend Gulf Arabs in case of direct threat*. Reuters.

[429] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 8*

Moreover, Egypt possesses security assets that enhance its ties with both the United States and the Gulf monarchies, further enhancing its regional leverage. In fact, its intelligence services have a long record of cooperation with Western, including Israel, and regional counterparts in the name of stability and moderation. For example, Egyptian services provided intelligence to CIA on Libya under Ghaddafi in the 1980s, on Iraq during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, and on al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups both before and after September 11 attacks. Cairo also played a key role in the U.S. *extraordinary rendition program,* during George W. Bush administration (2001-2009), which was formally presented as part of the campaign against Islamist extremism. Furthermore, General Omar Suleiman, Egypt's longtime intelligence chief, became a central figure in the secret diplomacy behind the Israel-Palestine conflict that was determinant to the Mubarak regime to present itself as an indispensable mediator.[430]

Turkey, on the other hand, as a NATO member with formal diplomatic ties to Israel, long fulfilled a complementary security role to the Egyptian during the Cold War, although it lacked Cairo's ability to shape or penetrate Arab politics. With the rise of the AKP in the 2002, Ankara recalibrated its Middle Eastern policy from one centered on security and military cooperation to an agenda also framed in terms of political reform and, after 2011, this shift directly destabilized Egypt's claim to regional primacy. [431] In fact, Turkey intensified efforts to expand the social and political foundation of its neoliberal project in the Arab world through open support to the *Muslim Brotherhood* in Egypt and elsewhere, arguing that an Islamic democracy based on the Turkish model could serve Western interests more effectively than authoritarian regimes.[432]

At the same time, Ankara reoriented its Palestinian policy by balancing its official ties with Israel with open political support for Hamas. In fact, Turkish leaders considered Hamas not as a terrorist organization but as a democratically elected Islamist movement that had legitimately won the 2006 Palestinian elections and therefore enjoyed stronger popular legitimacy than the Palestinian Authority (PA), which was increasingly depicted as ineffective and dependent on Israeli and Western protection. This stance, however, contrasted with Egypt's posture - since both

[430] *Ibid.*

[431] *Ibid.*

[432] Şener, M. B. (n.d.). *Turkish-Egyptian relations after 2011: Political dynamics of geopolitical turbulence. Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies, p. 113*

Mubarak and later Sisi governments privileged the PA as their main interlocutor – placing Ankara as an alternative mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[433]

Subsequently, as its reformist strategy reached its limits, Ankara turned to the use of hard power, intervening militarily in Syria, in 2016, and Libya, from 2019 to 2020, and formalizing a defense partnership with Qatar, positioning itself as a potential security guarantor for parts of the Gulf. Thus, this Turkey's assertive engagement challenged Egypt's role as the region main mediator both ideologically and politically, but also in the sphere of military influence.[434]

4.3 American Grand Strategy in the Middle East: Implications for Egypt and Turkey

Before analyzing in details the evolution of Turkey-Egypt foreign policy from 2011 onward, it is important to consider that Egyptian and Turkish foreign policies have also developed in close interaction with the broader strategic framework of the United States, probably the principal global power shaping the Middle East. Indeed, since the end of the Second World War in 1945, Washington has attached high priority to controlling the region, both for its vast energy resources and its strategic geopolitical location. However, the means to achieve this control have shifted over time. During the Cold War, the U.S. strategy was focused on accelerating the dismantling of European colonial influence, limiting Soviet penetration, and containing radical currents of Arab nationalism. To achieve these results, Washington primarily relied on a network of regional allies: authoritarian military regimes, such as those in Turkey and Egypt; the Gulf monarchies; and Israel. In Egypt, for example, U.S. food aid became a key instrument of the *Kennedy Doctrine* in the early 1960s, which tolerated certain socialist and anti-imperialist policies as long as they reduced support for communism and tied Cairo more firmly to the capitalist world. Variants of this approach would later reappear in American policies under President Obama.[435]

From the 1980s onward, U.S. grand strategy increasingly conferred more relevance to the aim of *democracy promotion*, conceived as a tool to shield peripheral regions from the influence

[433] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 9*

[434] *Ibid.*

[435] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 9*

of communism. In the Middle East, however, this rationale was consistently balanced with others fundamental priorities: safeguarding oil supplies and shipping routes, containing the revolutionary impact of Iran Revolution of 1979, and guaranteeing Israel's security. These concerns led Washington to continue supporting coercive and authoritarian regimes, while promoting democratization elsewhere. After the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the democracy promotion principle was projected more explicitly into the Middle Eastern context, intertwined with the broader U.S. ambition of reasserting regional primacy and sustaining global unipolarity, and justified by the claim that only by establishing stable democratic regimes in zones of conflict could be guaranteed the United States long-term own security, and provide an international system favorable to the American hegemony.[436]

In the aftermath of the Iraq War, U.S. strategy focused on using its own military and political power to reshape the Middle East, through a top-down imposition of new institutions and elections, in ways that would open the region to neoliberal economics. However, the collapse of this experiment in Iraq - where Washington failed to establish a stable, pro-American democratic regime – together with Israel's unsuccessful intervention in Lebanon in 2006 and the acknowledgment that imposing similar reforms on Egypt or the Gulf countries would be counterproductive, caused a recalibration of U.S. policy. The new approach focused on Turkey's role as a regional intermediary. Indeed, with the rise of the AKP in the early 2000s, Ankara appeared capable of exporting a model of neoliberal and Western-aligned Islamic democracy that could serve as a credible alternative to secular authoritarian regimes, and possibly reinforce U.S. capacity to expand its influence in the region. [437]

This strategic shift aligned with President Obama's efforts to ease the post-9/11 War on Terror rhetoric by stressing coexistence, cooperation and shared values. On this point, his 2009 Cairo speech was emblematic: he addressed the Muslim "people" rather than their rulers, and praised Erdoğan as a leader who had won repeated elections in a country depicted as possessing "strong democratic traditions in the region".[438] This new approach, built on inclusion and

[436] Drolet, J.-F. (2010, June 21). *A liberalism betrayed? American neoconservatism and the theory of international relations.* Journal of Political Ideologies, p.100

[437] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 9-10*

[438] C-SPAN. (2009, June 4). *President Obama speech to Muslim world in Cairo* [Video]. YouTube.

moderation principles, could be interpreted as a renewed version of the Kennedy Doctrine, and provided the global context in which Egypt and Turkey briefly found themselves aligned.[439]

4.4 The Evolution of Turkish–Egyptian Rivalry from 2011 to 2024

The regional rivalry between Egypt and Turkey has evolved significantly since the Arab Spring of 2011. After a brief and fragile phase of cooperation between 2011 and the Egyptian coup of July 2013, relations quickly shifted into open confrontation, which persisted until late 2022. Since then, the two countries have gradually moved toward a rapprochement that is still enduring. This pathway reflected the interconnection of global and regional shifts as well as domestic political changes in both states. The first phase of cooperation was eased by U.S. strategies that emphasized democracy promotion, the political opportunities offered by the Arab Spring, and the Qatari financial support for the new established Islamic democracy in Egypt.[440]

The subsequent phase of confrontation was the consequence of Washington's reorientation from democracy promotion to war against terrorism, following the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2014. This meant that stability, rather than political reform, became the new priority for the Obama administration and later Donald Trump's presidency (2017-2021), which favored strong authoritarian allies such as Egypt over more ideologically driven experiments like Turkey's support for political Islam. At the same time, Gulf monarchies, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, launched a counter-revolutionary campaign across the region, aimed at suppressing Islamist movements that acquired relevance during the Arab Spring and were perceived as existential threats to hereditary rule. Egypt became the leader of this movement after the 2013 coup, presenting itself as the guarantor of order against both Islamist militancy and democratic turmoil. Domestically, Cairo strengthened this role through the so-called *protection pact*, which aligned the new military regime with secular elites and certain Salafi group. Thus, a combination of external and domestic factors which reinforced Egypt's authoritarian reality while antagonizing Turkey, which had invested in supporting the other side.[441]

---

[439] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 10*

[440] *Ibid.*

[441] *Ibid.*

Finally, the phase of rapprochement, although not a full alignment, was determined by a new U.S. agenda under Joe Biden prioritizing regional integration and reconciliation, the resolution of intra-GCC disputes through the *Al-Ula Agreement* of January 2021, and Ankara's pragmatic decision to distance itself from the Brotherhood from 2021 onward.[442]

The Arab Spring and the Brief Turkish–Egyptian Alignment (2011–2013)

Between the outbreak of the Egyptian Revolution on 25 January 2011 and the military coup of 3 July 2013, Egypt and Turkey entered a period of alignment. This was prompted by Ankara's effort to expand its influence in Egypt taking advantage on the opening provided by the revolution over a previously closed political system. In fact, under Hosni Mubarak regime (1981-2011), Muslim Brotherhood, despite formally banned and facing recurrent crackdowns, arrests, and legal restriction, it was rather permitted to develop a strong nationwide organizational structure, through charities, cultural presence, and a political discourse grounded on anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism ideology, to the extent that it became a credible political contender. In other words, the Brotherhood became the political expression of Egypt's dissatisfied middle classes and the ideal AKP's leverage to export the *Turkish model*.[443] To this end, Ankara deployed not only political and ideological commitments but also significant economic resources, including a $2 billion loan to Cairo in September 2012, while its close partner Qatar provided an additional $5 billion pledge in 2012-2013.[444]

In pursuing this new strategy, Ankara also actively promoted the Muslim Brotherhood to Washington as a legitimate political actor, highlighting both its democratic potential and its popular legitimization. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu also articulated this vision in an interview with *The New York Times* in September 2011, where he argued that "a partnership between Turkey and Egypt could create a new democratic axis of power [without being against] Israel, not any other country, [but] an axis of democracy, real democracy"[445]. In doing so, Ankara helped soften Western

[442] *Ibid.*

[443] Şener, M. B. (n.d.). *Turkish-Egyptian relations after 2011 p.115*

[444] Aydın-Düzgit, S. (2014, July 24). *The seesaw friendship between Turkey's AKP and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

[445] Shadid, A. (2011, September 18). *Turkey predicts partnership with Egypt as regional anchors*. *The New York Times*.

skepticism towards the idea of working with an Islamist government in Cairo, also positioning itself as a mediator capable of bridging the Islamic movements and the Western world.[446]

This approach revealed successful because the United States started playing an active role in pushing Mubarak to step down, also as a consequence of alleged arrangements made between the Muslim Brotherhood and the American administration to ensure a smoother transition of power. Moreover, closer ties with Turkey were not only welcomed by Islamists but also largely accepted within the Egyptian society. Indeed, the *2011 Arab Barometer* survey indicated that 51% of Egyptian favored stronger relations with Turkey, while only 19% preferred maintaining the status quo.[447]

One way through which Turkey sought to influence Egypt's transition was by intensifying activism on the Palestinian question, an issue that was sensitive to Egyptian public opinion. In fact, Under Mubarak, Egypt's role in the Israel-Palestine conflict had been mainly defined in security terms and widely perceived as a form of subordination to Israel and the U.S. Indeed, from 2002 onward, Cairo trained Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces and played a key role in the PA's security sector reform during the 2000s. However, after Hamas's takeover of Gaza in June 2007, Egypt's policy changed towards enforcing the blockade of the Strip in coordination with Israel. Mubarak even approved the demolition of approximately 1,500 Palestinian homes in 2009 to construct the *Philadelphi corridor* and a seven-meter-high wall along the Gaza-Egypt border.[448]

The Mubarak regime considered Hamas's takeover as a "coup against legitimacy", urging Palestinians to take positions behind Mahmoud Abbas as the sole leader of the Palestinian cause.[449] This stance, overtly hostile to Hamas and seemingly deferential to Western and Israeli interests, raised a widespread perception of the regime illegitimacy, and became a symbolic complaint for many Egyptians, also creating an unusual point of convergence between secular and Islamist revolutionary forces, whose solidarity with Palestine was a common interest. Yet, this became a mean for Turkey to gain credibility within Egyptian society in post-Mubarak period.[450]

---

[446] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 11*

[447] *Ibid.*

[448] Pelham, N. (2011). *Gaza's tunnel phenomenon: The unintended dynamics of Israel's siege*. Institute for Palestine Studies; and Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 11-12*

[449] Reuters. (2007, June 24). *Angry Egypt says Hamas Gaza takeover was a coup*. Reuters

[450] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 12*

Turkey's stance on the Israel-Palestine issue broadly aligned with that of the United States, Egypt, and other Western-oriented Arab governments. Ankara did not propose an alternative resolution's mechanism to the conflict, but rather, it claimed to be better positioned to facilitate the outcome that its Western partners sought. In fact, what distinguished Turkey's approach was its willingness to engage directly with Hamas. Erdoğan considered Hamas not as an illegitimate militant group but as a democratically elected governing party, which also embodied the idea that the Turkish model of Islamic democracy could bring stability in the Middle East.[451] This engagement was not designed to challenge U.S. interests, but rather aimed to not isolate Hamas and avoid the risk of further radicalizing the movement and driving it into closer alignment with Iran and Syria.[452]

Following Mubarak's removal in February 2011, the Egyptian military tried to change its image as a little more than a security proxy for Israel. Thus, in partnership with Qatar, it facilitated a Hamas-Fatah reconciliation agreement in May 2011; reopened the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza; and did not intervene when demonstrators broke into the Israeli embassy in Cairo on 9 September 2011. Meanwhile, Turkey promoted the narrative that post-revolutionary Egypt, guided by Ankara's influence, could reclaim its true role as a champion of the Palestinian cause. A few days after the embassy incident, Erdoğan arrived in Cairo on 12 September 2011 and was welcomed as a hero. There it caught the occasion to call for immediate UN recognition of a Palestinian state and signaling Turkey's ambition to assume a leadership role in shaping the Arab Spring.[453]

However, this surge of Turkish activism on Palestine upset Egypt's military rulers, who perceived Erdoğan rising popularity as a threat to their own legitimacy. As Emirati columnist Sultan Al Qassemi observed at the time, "the Egyptian military won't necessarily appreciate this, but Turkey is an important ally and so they're letting him [Erdoğan] get away with it"[454]. The generals were also constrained by the political context at home: they needed to remain in harmony with the revolutionary movement and to public opinion, both of which supported greater solidarity

[451] Cagaptay, S. (2006, February 16). *Hamas Visits Ankara: The AKP Shifts Turkey's Role in the Middle East*. The Washington Institute.

[452] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 12*

[453] *Ibid.*

[454] Shenker, J. (2011, September 13). *Turkey rallies Arab world*. The Guardian.

with Palestine and welcomed Ankara's assertive role. Moreover, their accommodation of Turky inevitably reflected the favorable recognition that Erdoğan's initiatives had in Washington.[455]

Muhammad Morsi assumed presidency on 30 June 2012; however, he never succeeded in replicating one of the key elements of the Turkish model: subordinating the military to civilian authority. In fact, the *Supreme Council of the Armed Forces* (SCAF) drew directly on the 1982 Turkish constitution when drafting its Constitutional Declaration of 17 June 2012, which effectively deprived the presidency of its role as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.[456]

Nevertheless, Morsi was able to safeguard a degree of foreign policy autonomy: his approach reflected a strategy oriented to maintain the favor of the United States but also to consolidate his precarious domestic position. To this end, he visibly oriented Egypt's foreign policy around support for Palestinian cause, while simultaneously leveraging Turkey's growing regional influence and international recognition as a source of legitimacy.[457] Also to cover the fact that the Brotherhood did not really provide change neither from the neoliberal economic orthodoxy nor from the political structure of Western dominance inherited from and contested during the Mubarak era.[458]

In November 2012, Morsi was widely acclaimed for mediating a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas during *Operation Pillard of Defense* (14-21 November 2012), demonstrating of being able to find the right balance between pragmatism - to reassure both Washington and Tel Aviv - and continued support of the Palestinians, which guaranteed to not be considered as a simple heir of Mubarak. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also acknowledged this success when she praised Egypt's new leadership for "assuming the responsibility and leadership that has long made this country a cornerstone of regional stability and peace"[459]. This new representation was further reinforced when Prime Minister Hisham Qandil visited Gaza, during active confrontation, meeting Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in a show of solidarity with Gaza itself. Turkey capitalized on this moment to strengthen the perception of an Egyptian-Turkish partnership. Indeed, Erdoğan publicly lauded Morsi's withdrawal of the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv, and declared that "Egypt

---

[455] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 12-13*

[456] *Ibid.*

[457] Iyibilgi. (2012, November 18). *Erdoğan ve Mursi İsrail'i uyardı* [Erdoğan and Morsi warned Israel]

[458] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 13*

[459] Clinton, H. (2012, November 20). *Remarks With Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr*. U.S. Department of State.

and Turkey are one hand" [460]- deliberately echoing one of the central slogans of the 2011 uprising: "the people and the army are one hand" – with the purpose to further gain legitimacy as an active participant in the Egyptian revolutionary process, rhetorically aligning Turkey with both the people and the military.[461]

Morsi then tried to translate the political gain that derived from the Gaza ceasefire into greater domestic authority. Thus, on 22 November 2012, he issued a controversial constitutional decree which granted himself extensive legislative and executive powers. At the same time, he reorganized the military leadership dismissing several senior officers and promoting figures thought to be more sympathetic to the Brotherhood's agenda. This consolidation was accompanied by significant foreign policy initiatives, some of them particularly warned the military, such as his decision in June 2013 to overtly call for the resignation of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and to announce the severing of diplomatic ties with Damascus. [462] Also in this occasion, several factors prevented the military from directly challenging Morsi's policies, including the widespread public sympathy in Egypt for the Syrian uprising, the strengthening alignment with Turkey – which also started supporting Assad's removal,[463] - and Washington's own opposition to Assad.[464]

Morsi also sought to align Egypt's position on Libya more closely with that of Turkey, which saw in the post-Gaddafi transition a fertile ground for exporting the Turkish model to North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. By contrast, Egypt's generals were less enthusiastic about a radical break with the past, since the Gaddafi regime, especially after is reproachment with the West in the late 1990s, had become an important partner for Egypt's security establishment, which benefited from ties with Libyan officials as well as cross-border economic interest. [465] This helps explain why the Egyptian military resisted arresting wanted Libyan figure on its soil. Morsi, however, managed to overcome the military's cautiousness, and in March 2013, following a meeting with Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, Egyptian authorities arrested Qaddaf al-Dam, a cousin of Muammar Gaddafi who had been living in Cairo.[466]

---

[460] Cagaptay, S. (2019). *Erdoğan's failure on the Nile*. *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*.

[461] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 13*

[462] *Ivi, p. 13-14*

[463] See Chapter 3

[464] Ali, A. (2012, July 22). *Egypt's stake in the Syrian revolution*. openDemocracy.

[465] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 14*

[466] Al Jazeera. (2013, March 19). *Gaddafi aide surrenders after Cairo firefight*.

From Coup to Confrontation: The Egyptian–Turkish Rivalry (2013–2022)

The July 2013 military coup in Egypt ended Turkey's attempt to promote a regional order inspired by Islamic liberalism and modified again its ties with Egypt. The turning point was the overthrow of Mohammed Morsi and the subsequent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, the Brotherhood revealed to be not able to implement the awaited political and social projects that would have brought democracy to Egypt and eliminated social inequalities: wages did not adapt to inflation's level, and generally the living conditions worsened. People's confidence in Morsi declined, and demonstration against him erupted. Moreover, resistance from previous elites, who feared losing their privileges, of the old regime persisted, such as the bureaucracy, judiciary, media, and business circles, which also mobilized to undermine Morsi's government. [467]

The collapse of the Brotherhood also reflected a broader shift in U.S. strategy, marked by declining confidence in the Turkish model as a framework for stabilizing Egypt, post-Gaddafi Libya, and war-torn Syria after 2011. This change was also driven by opposition from other regional powers to Islamic liberalism, such as Saudi Arabia and UAE, alongside growing problems within Turkey itself.[468] As Washington's support waned, the region returned to the security-centered approach which characterized the pre-Arab Spring era, and discord between Ankara and Cairo was expressed through hostile rhetoric, proxy competition in Libya, from 2014 onward, and clashing stances on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Ultimately, Egypt's antagonism towards Turkey was further reinforced by the *protection pact* under President Sisi, which aimed to contain domestic unrest.[469]

Although democracy promotion was present in both neoconservative and liberal rhetoric, thus advanced by the Bush and Obama administration as an alternative to rely on fragile authoritarian regimes, it never became the dominant approach of U.S. influence in the Middle East. This was mainly due to Washington's regional partner which included Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel, and post-2013 Egypt, who consistently sustained security-center approaches over political reform as the best way to protect Western interests. Moreover, the failure of Egypt's democratic

[467] Şener, M. B. (n.d.). *Turkish-Egyptian relations after 2011 p.116*

[468] *Ibid.*

[469] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 14-15*

transition in 2013, combined with the militarization of the Syrian uprising, decisively moved U.S. policy of the Obama administration which reaffirm the need of relying on security and repression through allied regimes, rather than pursuing political liberalization.[470]

This shift in U.S. strategy began before Morsi's removal but accelerated quickly after it. Indeed, during Morsi's year in office, Washington became increasingly doubtful about the Muslim Brotherhood's ability to stabilize Egypt, and gradually returned to see the military as most reliable partner. Yet, many American politicians and commentators criticized Obama for engaging with what they saw as an anti-U.S. Islamist movement, in contrast with Egypt's long-standing military establishment which was traditionally Washington's closest ally. At the same, Syria showed the limits of U.S. democracy promotion, as the Bashar al-Assad regime, supported by Iran, survived despite American efforts to make it fall.[471]

That is why U.S. policy reverted once again to the Bush-era "War on Terror" orientation. Also fostered by the rise of ISIS in 2014, portrayed by regional allies as an existential danger to the West. Notably, the horrible representation of ISIS's territorial expansion and control of oil resources, coupled with violent practices mobilized a broad international support for prioritizing its defeat over promoting democratic change. Obama even reassured Iran's Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that American military operations would target ISIS and not Assad[472]. At the same time, Turkey's own democratic backsliding reduced Washington's enthusiasm for the Turkish model. In fact, the Gezi Park protests of May 2013 exposed the widespread discontent with the AKP's neoliberal policies and the weakness of its democracy.[473]

This disillusionment deepened under Donald Trump after 2016, and dismissed democracy promotion at all, also depicting Obama as the "founder of the IS"[474]. Egyptian media and social platforms also accused Obama of secretly supporting the Brotherhood, and similar accusations extended to U.S. officials such as Hillary Clinton and John McCain, thus reinforcing an anti-Brotherhood narrative, furtherly encouraged by the *Tamarud* protest movement, which even demanded that Cairo cut ties with Washington.[475]

---

[470] *Ivi, p. 15*

[471] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 15*

[472] Hof, F. C. (2014, November 10). *Reassuring the Supreme Leader*. Atlantic Council

[473] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 15*

[474] BBC News. (2016, August 11). *Trump insists 'Obama is founder of IS'. BBC*

[475] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 15*

The U.S. diversion in its Middle East strategy, compared to that performed during the Bush Era, this time was less articulated and left its regional allies to interpret, where possible, Washington's expectations, while pursuing their own strategies with greater autonomy. In this environment, Turkey pursued its *strategic autonomy* doctrine after 2016, also sustaining the right to act even in cooperation with U.S. rivals, while Egypt supported Russian-backed General Khalifa Haftar in Libya. However, this Trump administration's *laissez-faire* approach strained relations between Cairo and Ankara, both seeking to position as indispensable security providers. Notably, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE sided by Haftar, and framed their involvement as counterterrorism, advocating before Trump that militias in Tripoli as affiliates of ISIS and al-Qaeda; while Turkey supported the Tripoli-based authorities, first the UN-backed Government of National accord (GNA, 2016-2021), and later the Government of National Unity (GNU, from 2021).[476] In this context, Trump's acted ambiguously giving both Turkish and Egyptian leaders the conviction that Washington supported each of their positions, which ultimately result in an Egypt's threat to launch a ground invasion in July 2020 if Turkish backed forces advanced to the town of Sirte, declared by Sisi as a "red line"[477].

Cairo's conflict with Ankara was also an extension of the 2017 Gulf Crisis, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE opposing Qatar, a key economic supporter of Turkey's regional ambitions and of Islamist movements. Thus, Egypt's alignment with its Gulf partners was also a way of countering Turkey's claim to regional leadership. In fact, Qatar's continued sponsorship of the Brotherhood led to 2017 blockade implemented by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. On the other side Turkey responded supporting Doha, and also helping it bypassing the blockade. Subsequently, Ankara opened a military base in Qatar in 2016, concluded a *Joint Defense Plan* with Kuwait in 2018, and struke a deal with Sudan in 2017 to gain a presence on the Red Sea Island of Suaking. These moves were seen in Cairo and Riyadh as a direct strategic threat, also undermining Egypt's claim to be the Gulf's defender in times of crisis, and instead positioned Ankara as a more effective alternative security guarantor.[478]

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were united in their counter-revolutionary agenda, particularly in seeking the destruction of the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, Gulf states' financing and political backing were essential to Sisi's coup in 2013. The Brotherhood was immediately

---

[476] *Ivi, p. 16*

[477] ABC News. (2020, June 21). *Egypt's Sisi orders army to prepare amid tensions over Libya*. ABC News.

[478] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 16-17*

outlawed as a terrorist organization in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. However, this campaign extended also targeting liberal Islamist voices with Western visibility, such as Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who was murdered by Saudi agents in Istanbul in 2018. At some point, however, Egypt vision diverged from that of its Gulf partners. On Syria, for example, Cairo was more cautious about alternatives to Assad than Riyadh or Abu Dhabi, and when Gulf leaders launched initiatives to normalize relations with Erdoğan, Sisi tried to rehabilitate Assad, directly contradicting Saudi policy.[479]

Egypt did not counter Turkey's regional activism with an alternative attracting vision, but instead repristinated and heightened repression and the consolidation of a harsher authoritarian order - economically sustained by Gulf funds, and grounded on a security narrative centered on conspiratorial warnings about a wide array of threats, mostly related to the Muslim Brotherhood – which was able to seize elite sympathy through the assurance of protection against internal and external dangers, such as the potential resurgence of the Brotherhood, which would undermine the secular establishment and jeopardize elite economic interests; and the threat of social unrest unleashed after the 2011 revolution.[480]

The Sisi regime's antagonism toward Turkey's AKP fit perfectly into the logic of this sort of protection pact, which required, besides the demonization of the Brotherhood, but also demanded rejecting the broader regional project of political Islam that Turkey promoted. Thus, immediately after the coup, Egyptian media filled the public sphere with both anti-Brotherhood and anti-Turkish propaganda, and also Turkey's ideological influence was classified as a form of terrorism. Yet, the Egyptian government made efforts to counter Turkish soft power, including banning popular Turkish television dramas from Egyptian networks. Meanwhile, moderate Islamist voices, who had advocated for democratic reform, were systematically silenced through imprisonment or intimidation. In contrast, more conservative and authoritarian-tending Islamists, especially Salafi groups, were spared from repression and integrated into the regime's domestic support base. [481] Ultimately this discriminatory campaign succeeded to reshape public opinion: By

[479] *Ibid.*

[480] *Ivi, p. 17-18*

[481] Lacroix, S. (2016, November). *Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: The Politics of Hizb al-Nour*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 18*

2016, only 19% of Egyptians supported the strengthening ties with Turkey, a dramatic fall from the 51% expressed in 2011.[482]

Turkey, in contrast, provided refuge to the Muslim Brotherhood, granting the movement room to broadcast anti-Sisi and pro-democracy narratives across the Arab world. Ankara also continued to grant support to Islamist actors in Palestine and Libya. Domestically, the appeal of the Turkish model began to weaken after 2013, particularly in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests. However, in the years following the Egyptian coup, Turkey's Islamic liberalism was broadly used as a powerful tool for Turkey to differentiate itself from the region's more repressive regimes, such as Saudi Arabia. This discourse was primarily addressed at the European audiences, became significant after the murder of Khashoggi, but also used as a justification for its intervention in Libya. Indeed, in January 2020, Ankara launched a large and highly publicized military operation to prevent Haftar's forces from taking over Tripoli.[483] Moreover, Erdoğan explicitly framed Haftar as the beneficiary of "anti-democratic governments" in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, warning that such support could create conditions for ISIS and al-Qaeda to re-emerge, particularly through the role of Madkhali-Salafis who fought with Haftar[484].

It could be said that by mid-2010s, Turkey's support for regional Islamist movements did not reflect anymore a genuine attempt to export the Turkish model, which had already lost credibility both domestically and abroad. Instead, Ankara's stance against Sisi reflected an opposition not only for his authoritarian posture, but also to his open hostility to Islam itself. Moreover, portraying Sisi as anti-Islamic and a pawn of Israel and the West became Erdoğan's strategy to consolidate his Islamist base, especially after the Gezi Park protests and once again following the failed coup attempt of 2016.[485]

In this period, the AKP shifted toward a more militarized and nationalist foreign policy, a key feature of which was Ankara's continued backing of Hamas, sustaining its political recognition, in contrast to the weakened PA. Then, after Trump's 2017 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Erdoğan hosted an emergency summit of the *Organization of Islamic Cooperation* (OIC) in Istanbul on 13 December 2017 to mobilize opposition. Turkey's stance diverged radically

---

[482] Ceyhun, H. E. (2018). *Turkey in the Middle East: Findings from the Arab Barometer* (Working Paper). Arab Barometer.

[483] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 18*

[484] Erdoğan, R. T. (2020, January 18). *The road to peace in Libya goes through Turkey*. *Politico*.

[485] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 19*

from Egypt's, which until mid-2017 had refused to recognized Hamas as a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, maintaining the same strategy of the Mubarak-era of supporting Abbas and the PA.[486] Although Cairo officially condemned Washington's recognition of Jerusalem, its credibility was undermined by a *New York Times* report in January 2018 alleging that Egyptian intelligence had manipulated local media to persuade the public to quietly accept it[487].

In Libya, Sisi's support for Haftar was connected to the fear that the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood could gain access to the country's vast oil revenues and redirect them to Islamist groups across Egypt's borders. Thus, Cairo framed its involvement in Libya in counterterrorism terms, both to reassure Western allies and to attract domestic secular support. Haftar himself tried to develop an image of himself as a fierce opponent of Islamism also as a mean to obtain legitimization from Western secular forces. Indeed, France became his most significant Western supporter, although diverging from the EU's official position which did not agree in recognizing Haftar as a partner. For Egypt, portraying the GNA as associated with terrorism served to justify its interventions abroad and to strengthen Sisi's domestic position. In fact, Engagement in Libya was presented as both a patriotic duty to defend Egypt's' borders and as a part of the broader protection pact to safeguard domestic elites.[488]

At the same time, the rivalry in Libya was inseparable from the parallel competition over Eastern Mediterranean energy resources. In fact, after the discovery of several major offshore fields in the 2010s, which included Egypt's giant *Zohr field* in 2015, Cairo saw the opportunity to gain self-sufficiency gas production and to position itself as the central hub of the Eastern Mediterranean's energy architecture. This led Sisi to sign bilateral agreements with Cyprus, Greece, and Israel, and playing a leading role in the establishment of the *East Mediterranean Gas Forum* (EMGF) in Cairo in 2019, which brought together almost all relevant coastal states but deliberately excluded Turkey. This exclusion could inevitably be interpreted as Cairo's purpose to contain Ankara's influence and to consolidate a solid energy bloc that could attract European investments and strengthen its leverage in regional politics. Turkey, by contrast, rejected the EMGF framework and advanced its own interpretation of maritime jurisdiction, which

---

[486] *Ibid.*

[487] Kirkpatrick, D. (2018, January 6). *Tapes Reveal Egyptian Leaders' Tacit Acceptance of Jerusalem Move. The New York Times; and* Al Jazeera. (2018, January 7). *Egypt hosts 'told to convince viewers' over Jerusalem*. *Al Jazeera*

[488] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 19*

contradicted Egypt's agreement with Greece and Cyprus. Later, Ankara signed a controversial maritime deal with Tripoli-based Government of National Accord in 2019, which aimed to block competing pipeline projects without integrating Turkey, so to reassert its key role in the Mediterranean gas game.[489]

Pragmatism and Rapprochement without Alignment (2022–2024)

The highly publicized handshake between Erdoğan and Sisi at the World Cup in Doha in November 2022, marked the beginning of Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement. This was also fostered by a more conciliatory atmosphere from Washington, the resolution of the dispute between Qatar and the other GCC states, and Ankara's urgent need for Gulf investments, after the mounting of a deep economic crisis from the early 2020s, marked by soaring inflation which peaked above 85% in October 2022, while foreign debt exceeded $450 billion which was eroding public opinion confidence and challenging the political sustainability of Erdoğan himself, for the first time since coming to power in 2002. Factors that ultimately pushed Turkey to distance itself from the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the seeds of this rapprochement could also be seen as early as 2017, when Egypt accepted to engage directly with Hamas during its talks with Fatah, and after the October 2020 ceasefire in Libya, which helped ease one of the most acute crises between the two states. [490] Following the handshake, Erdoğan visited Saudi Arabia, and closed several Turkey-based Muslim Brotherhood channels and expelled some of its activists from its territory. Relations continued to improve over the next two years, and in 2024 both presidents exchanged official visits and struck a major trade deal which aimed at increasing threefold their bilateral trade to $15 billion, from about $5 billion in 2022. Lastly, Ankara also supported Egypt's mediation effort in Hamas-Israel war after 7 October 2023.[491]

Rapprochement did not translate into full alignment. In fact, Egypt and Turkey continued to compete for influence in the Israel-Palestine conflict, both seeking to position as a mediator favored by Washington. In Libya, the two powers reached not a definitive settlement but rather a

[489] Sukkarieh, M. (2024, December 23). *Will the rapprochement unlock the full potential of the Eastern Mediterranean's natural gas wealth?* ISPI (Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale)

[490] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 20*

[491] Cousin, E. (2024, September 5). *'Better together': Presidents of Egypt, Turkey seek common ground in Ankara*. Al Jazeera

precarious stalemate. Moreover, Ankara did not entirely close its ties with the Brotherhood. However, what changed was the modality of Turkey's regional orientation: political ambitions rooted in Islamic liberalism softened, while economic and security projection gain priority. Thus, this shift established a framework of competition that Egypt and its Gulf allies found more tolerable, because reflecting their own preference for a more securitized regional order. An important remark is that this reconciliation advanced essentially because of Turkish concessions, not Egyptian ones, which reflected Ankara's pressing need to overcome isolation and reintegrate within the regional security architecture.[492]

Donald Trump's failure to win a second consecutive term in office urged Turkey's efforts to formalize rapprochement with Egypt, yet it encouraged Cairo and its Gulf allies to bury their hatchets. Indeed, Trump's departure meant, for Erdoğan, the loss of a sympathetic posture in Washington with regard to his *strongman* diplomacy. In fact, under Joe Biden, U.S.-Turkey relations strained, notably after Biden's official recognition of the Armenian Genocide in April 2021 which underscored Washington's discontent with Turkish nationalism, and disinterest in reviving the Turkish model to advance democracy promotion in the Middle East. Instead, Biden reintroduced liberal discourse into U.S. global strategy, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, framing geopolitics as a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism[493] and, regarding Middle East, continued Obama's pattern of reducing direct U.S. commitments while trying to maintain overall dominance, though without a clear doctrine to anchor American influence.[494]

In this new context, Saudi and UAE tried to realign their policies with Biden's expectations in order to secure continued U.S. guarantees for their regimes' stability. Thus, further security and economic integration between the Gulf and Israel was pursued, following the *Abraham Accords* already signed in 2020 under President Trump goodwill, and in 2021 ensued the Saudi-Emirati reconciliation with Qatar (al-Ula Agreement).[495]

In this shifting international and regional environment, Cairo had interest to show greater moderation on the international level to avoid possible conflict with the new US administration[496].

---

[492] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 20*

[493] Although it was rather quite regarding governance in the Arab world.

[494] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 21*

[495] *Ibid.*

[496] Melcangi, A. (2021, June 1). *Egypt recalibrated its strategy in Libya because of Turkey*. Atlantic Council

Similarly, Erdoğan sought to use rapprochement with Egypt to present himself to the Biden administration as a leader oriented toward reconciliation. Indeed, the improvements of this rivalry was most evident in Libya. Khalifa Haftar's failed attempt to capture Tripoli in 2019-2020, also due to the decisive Turkish military support for the GNA, prompted Egypt to reestablish ties with the GNU after the ceasefire of October 2020. Furthermore, Biden's abandonment of counterterrorism as a central framework, combined with a tougher stance against Russia than that of Trump, created incentives for both Egypt and Turkey to accept a troubled balance in Libya which preserved their influence, Turkey in the west and Egypt in east, without resolving the conflict. Moreover, both states were also motivated by the prospect of exploiting the recently discovered Eastern Mediterranean gas reserves which required some degree of maritime compromise over boundaries, and regional stability.[497]

Hamas's 7 October 2023 assault on Israel, and this latter's devastating response in Gaza, triggered an intense series of diplomatic actions across the Middle East. At first, Egypt and Turkey appeared aligned. In fact, Ankara welcomed Cairo's refusal to admit refugees and even provided Egypt with Bayraktar TB2 drones. However, a new axis emerged between Egypt and Qatar, which worked together to negotiate humanitarian ceasefires, facilitate prisoner and hostage exchanges, and coordinate limited aid deliveries into Gaza; but excluding Turkey, despite its closer ties with Doha. Ankara, rather, came back on familiar discourses condemning Israel in the harshest way, also charging Israel with accusations of genocide and war crimes framing Palestine as a central Islamic cause, and supporting Hamas as a legitimate liberation movement. This stance effectively excluded Turkey from serious mediation efforts, notably given Washington's neat support for Israel's operations. On the other side, this reconfirmed Egypt as having far more credibility than Ankara as a stabilizing actor.[498]

[497] Şener, M. B. (n.d.). *Turkish-Egyptian relations after 2011 p.118*

[498] Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy, p. 23*

Conclusion

The evolution of Turkey's Foreign policy since the Özal's era demonstrates a deep transformation from a state traditionally anchored to the Western alliance to a country that has been seeking to project itself as an autonomous regional power. The research question that inspired this thesis "*How has Turkey's foreign policy evolved since Özal's era, and why has it led to a geopolitical rivalry with Egypt over Regional Hegemony in the Middle East?"* can now be answered by synthetizing the historical, ideological, and structural dynamics examined throughout the previous chapters.

The Özal era marked a decisive departure from the rigid Kemalist orthodoxy and set the beginning of a multidimensional foreign policy that merged liberal economic reforms, Islamic-cultural references, and pragmatic Western alignment. Through structural economic liberalization and a new export-oriented growth model, Özal tied domestic transformation with external engagement, also turning foreign policy into a tool for Turkey's economic modernization. His multidirectional diplomacy expanded Turkey's projection to the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans, while maintaining strong ties with NATO and Western institutions. However, by cautiously reintroducing Islamic and Ottoman elements into Turkey's external identity, Özal challenged the exclusivity of the secular and Western reference in Turkish foreign policy. Moreover, this ideological flexibility allowed Ankara to present itself as a bridge between East and West. Ultimately, it could be affirmed that Özal's vision reshaped the parameters of Turkish foreign policy, laying the foundation for successive decades' debates on identity, strategic autonomy, and regional leadership.

The 1990s highlighted both the opportunities and the limitations of Turkey's post-Cold War foreign policy. In fact, the dissolution of the USSR expanded Ankara's capacity to purse more assertive roles in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East while still relying on multilateral frameworks like NATO and the UN. However, this external activism contrasted with deep domestic fragility: political instability, fragile coalitions, and the military's dominance constrained consistency and limited Turkey's capacity to translate activism into long-term strategy. Ankara's EU pathway reflected the same ambivalence. While the Customs Union of 1996 strengthened economic ties, political membership to the European Union remained blocked due to persistent concerns over democracy, human rights, Cyprus, and the Kurdish question. Thus, revealing a gap between economic convergence and political exclusion which exemplified Turkey's structural

constraints. All considered, the 1990s were less a phase of stagnation than one of transition: Ankara was able to experiment new roles and tested the limits of its regional influence, but lacked the stability and a consistent vision to consolidate them. However, these experiences prepared the ground for the more cohesive and ambitious foreign policy of the early 2000s.

During the AKP era, Turkish foreign policy experiences a shift from a bureaucratic and security-based framework to a highly personalized and unpredictable instrument, which primarily serve the survival and consolidation of Erdoğan's ruling. In the first phase, a pragmatic orientation drove Ankara towards Europeanization and reforms which opened new opportunities for Turkey's further integration within the European Union system. However, as the AKP consolidated power, ideology began to play a major role in shaping external actions. Indeed, Under Ahmet Davutoğlu's doctrine of *strategic depth*, Turkey tried to position, as a model of Islamic democracy and a natural leader within the Muslim world. Particularly during the Arab Spring, this vision became evident with Ankara openly supporting Islamis movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, where political Islam was leveraged to legitimize its regional leadership in opposition with authoritarian regimes. Subsequently, the failure of this project, due primarily to the 2013 coup in Egypt, but also the failure of Islamist experiments in the Arab world, marked a turning point. In fact, in combination with growing domestic dissatisfaction, Turkey's foreign policy shifted back toward securitization, authoritarian consolidation, and reliance on hard power. Thus, Turkish foreign policy has become inseparable from Erdoğan's willingness, thus alternating between an ideological assertiveness style and pragmatic realignment depending on the regime's perception of security. Eventually, it could be said that from the optimism toward EU accession to the crisis of relations with the West and the alignment with BRICS, from Davutoğlu's expansive vision of *strategic depth* to Erdoğan's post-2016 militarization the AKP completely redefined Ankara's regional and global role.

This pathway set the ground for Turkey's open rivalry with Egypt. In fact, Cairo, under Mubarak, represented a conservative and U.S.-oriented Arab system. The Arab Spring and the Morsi presidency (2012-2013) led a temporarily alignment with Turkey grounded on a shared political Islamist ideology. However, the 2013 coup restored Egypt's traditional authoritarian regime under Sisi, backed by Gulf monarchies and the United States, and made the Turkish supported Muslim Brotherhood object of repression. From that moment, Egypt and Turkey became structural rivals. In fact, Ankara's promotion of political Islam and its subsequent military interventions directly challenged Cairo's self-perception as the Arab world's guard of stability and

conservative order. Indeed, the rivalry manifested across multiple fronts. In Libya, Turkey and Egypt supported opposing factions, turning the conflict into a proxy war. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ankara's support for Hamas was at odds with Egypt's role as usual mediator favoring the Palestinian Authority. Yet, in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo stipulated alliances with Greece, Cyprus, and Israel through the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, explicitly excluding Turkey, while Ankara advocated its own maritime claims contrasting the firsts pipeline's projects which would make Egypt a prominent energy hub in the region. Eventually, the 2022 is considered the year where the rapprochement has begun, though it is evident that it has been influenced by Turkish concessions to overcome economic crisis and diplomatic isolation, rather than by a genuine convergence of visions.

To provide an answer to the research question, Turkey's foreign policy evolution since Özal can be understood as the interaction of three dynamics. First, the progressive erosion of Turkey's exclusive Western alignment. It means that while remaining a NATO member and an economic partner of Europe, Ankara has progressively distanced itself from the EU accession framework and from Washington's umbrella. This shift began in the 1990s due to stalled European membership progress, and accelerated after the 2000s, as a consequence of the disappointment with the EU process, progressive American disengagement in the Middle East, and growing nationalism that pushed Ankara toward a more autonomous role in regional politics. Second, what began under Özal as a cautious reintegration of Islamic identity into Turkey's diplomacy evolved under the AKP into a full-fledged support of Islamic liberalism and the representation of Turkey as a model able to merge Islam, democracy, and neoliberal economics. This vision became prominent during the Arab Spring, when Ankara backed movements such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. However, when Morsi was overthrown in 2013, and the enthusiasm boosted by the revolution slowed down, it progressively exposed Turkey to isolation in the Middle East where counter-revolutionary regimes gathered around opposition to political Islam. Third, the shift toward a securitized, militarized projection of power became the pillar of Turkey's foreign policy from the mid-2010s onward. Military intervention in Syria, Libya, and later an assertive stance in the Eastern Mediterranean reflected Ankara's new reliance on hard power to preserve its interests. This militarization not only strengthened Erdoğan's domestic legitimacy but also placed Turkey as a disruptive actor able to challenge existing equilibria.

Rivalry with Egypt emerged as a consequence of this shift: Ankara's ideological promotion of political Islam undermined Cairo's self-perception as the Arab world's conservative and

stabilizing leader; while Turkey's increasingly autonomous and militarized projection, exemplified by its intervention in Libia and its maritime deal with GNA, directly opposed Egypt's alliances and strategic interests. These events did not just complicate bilateral ties, but caused a full-fledged clash with Egypt's role as the traditional guardian of an authoritarian Arab order, transforming parallel ambitions into a structural rivalry over leadership in the Middle East.

Structural divergences persist, although both states have recognized the costs of this confrontation. Turkey has undoubtedly positioned itself as a new diplomatic force in a post-Western Mediterranean order, and will continue challenge Egypt's capacity to defend its cultural prominence in the Arab world. However, the advancement of this competition is not easy to estimate because it will also strongly depend on the shifting priorities of external powers, notably the United States and the Gulf monarchies.

Bibliography

Chapter 1

Primary Sources

Anavatan Partisi. (n.d.). *Anavatan Partisi programı* [Political party program]. Ankara: ANAP Yayınları. https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/server/api/core/bitstreams/c596929c-84ac-4391-860c-4bc1c3ca7828/content

Bush, G. H. W. (1991, March 26). *Remarks following discussions with President Turgut Özal of Turkey*. In *Public papers of the Presidents of the United States: George H. W. Bush (1991, Book I, pp. 303–305)*. U.S. Government Publishing Office. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/html/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg303-2.htm

Commission of the European Communities. (1989, December 20). *Commission opinion on Turkey's request for accession to the Community* (SEC(89) 2290 final). https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2005/2/4/4cc1acf8-06b2-40c5-bb1e-bb3d4860e7c1/publishable_en.pdf

eFilmDizi. (2012, March 15). *Turgut Özal belgeseli* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXpwGSE9PWw&t=114s

Grand National Assembly of Turkey. (2019). *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*. https://anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa_eng.pdf

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. *Report and Resolutions of the Seventh Session of the COMCEC (Istanbul, 6–9 October 1991)*. Istanbul: COMCEC, 1991. https://www.comcec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/COMCEC07_91E.pdf

Özal, T. (1991). *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Revised English ed.). K. Rustem & Brother.

Reagan, R. (1985, April 2). *Remarks following discussions with Prime Minister Turgut Özal of Turkey*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-following-discussions-prime-minister-turgut-ozal-turkey

Republic of Turkey. (1982, November 7). *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*. Refworld. https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1982/en/17317

Rutherford Living History. (2016, August 1). *Living History presents Turgut Özal* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xk9MDDWYQFA&t=287s

Law No. 2820. (1983, April 22). *Siyasal Partiler Kanunu* [Political Parties Law]. Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuat?MevzuatNo=2820&MevzuatTur=1&MevzuatTertip=5

United Nations Secretary-General. (1977, April 30). *Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of Security Council resolution 401 (1976)* (S/12323). United Nations Security Council.

U.S. Department of State. (1964, June 5). *Telegram from President Johnson to Prime Minister İnönü* (Document No. 54). In *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVI: Cyprus; Greece; Turkey*. U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v16/d54

Secondary Sources

Athanassopoulou, E. (2024). *Turkey's relations with Israel: The first sixty-two years, 1948–2010*. Routledge. https://www.perlego.com/book/4575320/turkeys-relations-with-israel-the-first-sixty-two-years19482010

Calabrese, J. (1998). Turkey and Iran: Limits of a stable relationship. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 75–94. https://www.jstor.org/stable/195848

Çalış, Ş. H. (2016). *Turkey's Cold War: Foreign policy and Western alignment in the modern Republic*. I.B. Tauris. https://www.perlego.com/book/919857/turkeys-cold-war-foreign-policy-and-western-alignment-in-the-modern-republic

Elik, S. (2012). *Iran–Turkey relations, 1979–2011: Conceptualising the dynamics of politics, religion and security in middle-power states*. Routledge. https://www.perlego.com/book/1675118/iranturkey-relations-19792011-conceptualising-the-dynamics-of-politics-religion-and-security-in-middlepower-states

Goshko, J. M. (1983, November 22). *Turk warned on backing Cypriot move; administration says Congress might impose tough aid restrictions*. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1983/11/23/turk-warned-on-backing-cypriot-move/b7c34926-d129-43ae-ab8f-1d8fa0687d9a

Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy since 1774* (3rd ed.). Routledge. https://www.perlego.com/book/1625767

Koru, S. (2011). Turgut Özal period in Turkish foreign policy: Özalism. *USAK Yearbook of Politics and International Relations*, 2, 165–190. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=intyb&handle=hein.intyb/usakybipl0002&id=166

Kutalmış Yalçın, A. (2018). *Nationalist Democracy Party in the Turkish Political Life (1983–1986)* [Türk Siyasal Hayatında Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi (1983–1986)]. *The Journal of Academic Social Science* https://doi.org/10.16992/ASOS.13943

Moreno Juste, A., & Blanco Sío-López, C. (2016). *Spain and the European integration process, 1945–2010*. CVCE – Centre for European Studies. https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2010/5/11/bf91b328-fbed-4a65-9a3b-eadc21a7e831/publishable_en.pdf

Müftüler, M. (1995). Turkish economic liberalization and European integration. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31(1), 85–98. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4283700

New York Times. (1987, March 29). *[Greeks and Turks ease Aegean Crisis]*. The New York Times. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1987/03/29/115787.html

Özbudun, E., & Gençkaya, Ö. F. (2009). *Democratization and the politics of constitution-making in Turkey*. Central European University Press. https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/1983861/4

Rumelili, B. (2004). *The European Union's impact on the Greek-Turkish conflict: A review of the literature* (Working Paper No. 6). University of Birmingham, Department of Political Science and International Studies. https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/government-society/polsis/research/2006/eu-border-conflict/wp06-eu-impact-on-the-greek-turkish-conflict.pdf

Sayarı, S. (1992). Turkey: The changing European security environment and the Gulf crisis. *The Middle East Journal*, 46(1), 9–21. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4328390

Soysal, C. (2020). *The stillborn neo-Ottomanist foreign policy aspiration of the Özal era* (Doctoral dissertation). Middle East Technical University. https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12625027/index.pdf

Walsh, E. (1983, November 7). *Turkish voters apparently deal rulers a rebuff*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1983/11/07/turkish-voters-apparently-deal-rulers-a-rebuff/b6ab8a73-1a8d-4d2f-8a97-0ef586bdaa9c/

Chapter 2

Primary Sources

AP Archive. (2015, July 21). *UK: Turkish PM Tansu Çiller meets with John Major in London* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Il44UcAHds

Bush, G. H. W. (1992, February 11). *Remarks at the departure ceremony for Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel of Turkey* (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George H. W. Bush, Book I, pp. 225–226). U.S. Government Publishing Office. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1992-book1/pdf/PPP-1992-book1-doc-pg225.pdf

Cem, İ. (1998, October 20). *Statement made by Ismail Cem, Foreign Minister, on the special security meeting held between Turkey and Syria* [Unofficial translation]. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/_p_statement-made-by-ismail-cem_-foreign-minister_-on-the-special-security-meeting-held-between-turkey-and-syria_br_october-20_-1998_br__unofficial-translation___p_.en.mfa#:~:text=relations,entails%20the%20following%20commitments

Council of the European Union. (1992, June 26–27). *Presidency Conclusions: European Council, Lisbon, 26–27 June 1992* [PDF document]. Council of the European Union. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20510/1992_june_-_lisbon__eng_.pdf

Council of the European Union. (1995, December 22). *Decision No 1/95 of the EC–Turkey Association Council on implementing the final phase of the Customs Union* (OJ L 35, pp. 1–47). Official Journal of the European Communities. Accessed on August 25, 2025 from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/1995/1(5)/oj

Council of the European Union. (1997, December 12–13). *Conclusions of the Luxembourg European Council (12 and 13 December 1997)*. CVCE – European Union Digital Archive. Accessed on August 24, 2025 from https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/conclusions_of_the_luxembourg_european_council_12_and_13_december_1997-en-8719c6c3-776a-4d6e-8ee5-95dec39eae37.html

Council of the European Union. (2001, May 28). *Turkish national programme for the adoption of the acquis*. Council of the European Union. https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/news/2001/jun/turkey.pdf

Council of the European Union. (2001, March 8). *Council Decision 2001/235/EC on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey* [Official Journal of the European Communities, L 85/13].

European Commission. (2001, November 13). *2001 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession* (SEC(2001) 1756 final). European Commission. Accessed on August 24, 2025 from https://www.ab.gov.tr/siteimages/birimler/kpb/tr_rep_20061998/2001_tr_rap.pdf

European Parliament. (1995, March 6). *Resolution on the draft agreement on the conclusion of a customs union between the EU and Turkey* (OJ C 056, p. 099). Official Journal of the European Communities. Accessed on August 24, 2025, from from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:51995IP0171

European Parliament. (1999, December 10–11). *Presidency conclusions – Helsinki European Council*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm

European Parliament. (2002, April 11). *Verbatim report of proceedings: Thursday, 11 April 2002 – Strasbourg*. Official Journal of the European Parliament. Accessed on August 24, 2025 from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-5-2002-04-11_EN.html

Ferzan Tube. (2018, April). *Erbakan'ın tarikat liderlerine iftar yemeği (1997)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgYKp-4Youc

Grand National Assembly of Turkey. (2019). *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*. https://anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa_eng.pdf

Kinzer, S**.** (1996, October 9). *Tirade by Qaddafi stuns Turkey's premier*. *The New York Times*. Accessed from https://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/09/world/tirade-by-qaddafi-stuns-turkey-s-premier.html

Republic of Turkey. (1982, November 7). *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*. Refworld. https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1982/en/17317

Swardson, A. (1997, July 16). *EU picks 6 countries for talks this year on eventual membership*. *The Washington Post*. Accessed on August 24, 2025 from https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1997/07/16/eu-picks-6-countries-for-talks-this-year-on-eventual-membership/6a38bdeb-855c-47af-b12b-198ec529580b/

T.C. Resmî Gazete. (1993, July 6). *TBMM kararı: Bakanlar Kuruluna güvenildiğine dair (Karar No. 247)* [Grand National Assembly decision: On the vote of confidence granted to the Council of Ministers (Decision No. 247)]. *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, (21629), 1. https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/21629.pdf

T.C. Resmî Gazete. (1996, March 13). *TBMM Kararı: Bakanlar Kuruluna Güven Oylaması Hakkında* [Grand National Assembly decision: On the vote of confidence granted to the Council of Ministers (Decision No. 398)]. *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, (22579). https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/22579.pdf

T.C. Resmî Gazete. (1997, July 13). *TBMM Kararı* Bakanlar Kuruluna güven oylaması hakkında [Grand National Assembly decision: On the vote of confidence granted to the Council of Ministers (Decision No. 509)]. *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, (23048). https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/23048.pdf

Theodoulou, M. (n.d.). *1992–1994 Ghali set of ideas*. *Cyprus Mail* https://cyprus-mail.com/divided-island/the-peace-proccess/1992-1994-ghali-set-of-ideas

Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. (2013). *Koalisyon hükümetleri, koalisyon protokolleri, hükümet programları ve genel kurul görüşmeleri (Cilt 3)* (Haz. Dr. İ. Neziroğlu & Dr. T. Yılmaz). Ankara: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Yayınları.

United Nations. (2004, March 31). *The comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem* [PDF]. United Nations. Accessed from https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/annanplanmarch302004.pdf

U.S. State Department. (1995, December 3). *Joint U.S.–European Union Action Plan* [Public policy document]. U.S. Department of State. https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/european_union_agenda.html

White House. (1999, November 17). *Background briefing by senior administration official on Caspian-Sea diplomacy and the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline* [Press briefing]. The White House. https://clintonwhitehouse6.archives.gov/1999/11/1999-11-17-background-briefing-on-caspian-pipeline-diplomacy.html

Secondary Sources

Amnesty International. (1997, December). *Turkey: The colours of their clothes – Parliamentary deputies serve 15 years' imprisonment for expressions of Kurdish identity* (AI Index: EUR 44/85/97). Accessed on August 24, 2025 from https://www.amnesty.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur440851997en.pdf

Atlamazoglou, S. (2022, May 8). *Imia-Kardak island dispute between Greece, Turkey almost sparked war*. Business Insider. Accessed August 23, 2025 from https://www.businessinsider.com/imia-kardak-island-dispute-between-greece-turkey-almost-sparked-war-2022-5

Blocker, J. (1998, September 9). *Iran/Turkey: United in distrust of Taliban*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Accessed on August 24, 2025 from https://www.rferl.org/a/1089476.html

Çakır, Ö. (2014). *Turkey's foreign policy In the Post-Cold War Era* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham]. University of Birmingham eTheses Repository. https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/5499/1/Cakir14PhD.pdf

D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation. (n.d.). *Purposes & objectives*. Accessed August 23, 2025, from https://developing8.org/about-d-8/purposes-objectives/

Gündoğan, B. (2019, February 27). *"Postmodern darbe"nin 22. yılı* [22nd anniversary of the "postmodern coup"]. Anadolu Ajansı. Accessed August 23, 2025, from https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/28-subat/postmodern-darbenin-22-yili/1404091

Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy since 1774* (3rd ed.). Routledge. https://www.perlego.com/book/1625767

Harden, B. (1992, March 19). *Turkish premier voices worries over pull of ethnic conflict in Caucasus*. *The Washington Post*. Accessed from https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/03/19/turkish-premier-voices-worries-over-pull-of-ethnic-conflict-in-caucasus/9c43c9db-806c-4388-a3e7-eb4adf3c1b1a/

Hürriyet. (2001, November 1). *Ecevit: Özel harekat grubu subay ve astsubaydan oluşuyor* [Ecevit: Special operations group consists of officers and non-commissioned officers]. Bigpara (Hürriyet). Accessed on August 24, 2025 from https://bigpara.hurriyet.com.tr/haberler/politika-haberleri/ecevit-ozel-harekat-grubu-subay-ve-astsubaydan-olusuyor_ID386926

Kalaycıoğlu, E. (1994). Elections and party preferences in Turkey. *Comparative Political Studies, 27*(3), 402–424. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414094027003004 https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/compls27&id=382&collection=journals&index=

Leander, A. (1996). 'Robin Hood' politics? Turkey missing the chance to adopt a new model in the 1990s. *Review of International Political Economy, 3*(1), 132–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692299608434348 https://research.ebsco.com/c/cxrku5/viewer/pdf/uzbomfh2db?route=details

Makovsky, A. (1999). The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy. *SAIS Review (1989-2003)*, *19*(1), 92–113. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45345817

Nachmani, A. (2003). *Turkey facing a new millennium: Coping with intertwined conflicts*. Manchester University Press.

https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/34989/341407.pdf;jsessionid=2637C18C27D01A86AD24C060488B559A?sequence=1

Nelson, D. N. (1991). Turkish uncertainties: Domestic and foreign policy identities in the 1990s. In D. N. Nelson (Ed.), *Balkan imbroglio* (pp. 91–107). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429044687-6 https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2843143/11?element_originalid=Ch05&page_number=91

Oğur, Y. (2018, April 14). *Türkiye'yi boğan o dalgaların sonu…* Serbestiyet. Accessed August 23, 2025, from https://serbestiyet.com/yazarlar/turkiyeyi-bogan-o-dalgalarin-sonu-10083/

Öniş, Z. (1995). Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era: In Search of Identity. *Middle East Journal*, *49*(1), 48–68. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328771 https://www.jstor.org/stable/4328771?casa_token=DxTQ7PDdAT4AAAAA%3AmxSNQZYf4tQ7S_D5sJbgcuCDuMvdG8rXBr4u6jiZ4-6hiYGjH5V8_O4T9lsGEDsXqhNCO1opsgP8_szkMrEU14yXQdE6wUKoiqwom7tI6InsYhid09-l&seq=1

Pope, H. (1993, April 6). *Turkey "must show its teeth" to Armenia: Military help for Azerbaijan urged*. *The Independent*. Accessed from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/turkey-must-show-its-teeth-to-armenia-military-help-for-azerbaijan-urged-1453934.html

Sayarı, S. (1997). Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s. *Journal of Palestine Studies, 26*(3), 44–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.1997.26.3.00p0134c https://www.jstor.org/stable/2538156?seq=1

Sayarı, S. (2000). Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era: The challenges of multi-regionalism. *Journal of International Affairs*, *54*(1), 169–182. https://research.ebsco.com/c/cxrku5/viewer/pdf/wanawtuiff

Seren, M. (2020). *Appreciating Turkey's Afghanistan Policy*. Horizons, 20. Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development. https://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-winter-issue-20/appreciating-turkeys--afghanistan-policy

Singh, T., & Recknagel, C. (1999, February 9). *Turkey: Ocalan affair ignites dispute in Greece*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Accessed on August 23, 2005, from https://www.rferl.org/a/1090577.html

Chapter 3

Primary Sources

Associated Press. (2009, January 29). *WRAP Turkish PM leaves stage after clash with moderator on Gaza debate* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Tr5mqI7D0w

Associated Press. (2014, August 28). *Erdoğan declares his election is "day Turkey is born from its ashes." The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/28/recep-erdogan-turkey-president-oath-of-office

Davutoğlu, A. (2001). *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position]. İstanbul: Küre Yayınları.

Davutoğlu, A. (2008). **"**Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007." *Insight Turkey.* https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/it/v10i1/0000917.pdf

European Parliament. (2004, March). *Legislative resolution on the application by the Republic of Cyprus to become a member of the European Union (Assent procedure)*. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 64 E, 365. Retrieved from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/res/2003/171/oj/eng

Obama, B. H. (2011, May 19). *Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa

Obama, B. H. (2013, September 10). *Remarks by the President in address to the nation on Syria*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria

Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretariat General for EU Affairs. (2007). *Political Reforms in Turkey*. Ankara. Retrieved from https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/pub/prt.pdf

T.C. Resmî Gazete. (2002, November 29) *TBMM Kararı:* Başbakan Abdullah Gül tarafından TBMM'ne sunulan 58 inci Hükümet Programı [The 58th Government Programme presented to TBMMne by Prime Minister Abdullah Gul]*T.C. Resmî Gazete*, (24950). https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2002/11/20021129.htm#1

T.C. Resmî Gazete. (2011, July 17). *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, issue 27997: TBMM Kararı 998 ve eki 61'inci Hükûmet Programı [Grand National Assembly Decision No. 998 and annexed Program of the 61st Government]. Retrieved from https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2011/07/20110717-1.htm

Secondary Sources

Akkoyunlu, K. (2021). *The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP*. Social Research: An International Quarterly

Al Jazeera. (2020, July 28). *Turkey pauses energy-exploration research in east Mediterranean*. *Al Jazeera English*. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/28/turkey-pauses-energy-exploration-research-in-east-mediterranean

Al Jazeera. (2021, November 23). *UAE crown prince to meet Erdogan for talks to 'improve relations'. Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/23/uae-crown-prince-set-to-visit-turkey-to-condo-ties

Aydinli, P. (2010, May 7). *Turkish government pushes reforms towards referendum*. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE64634M

Balta, E. (2024, July 9). *Normalizing transactionalism: Turkish foreign policy after the 2023 elections*. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from https://www.mei.edu/publications/normalizing-transactionalism-turkish-foreign-policy-after-2023-elections

Botel-Azzinnaro, K. (2018, June 28). *Smart power rhetoric: One reason for Erdoğan's re-election*. European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_smart_power_rhetoric_erdogans_reelection/

Burch, J. (2013, July 19). *Turkey's Erdogan slams world's 'double standards' on Egypt*. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkeys-erdogan-slams-worlds-double-standards-on-egypt-idUSBRE96I0NJ/

Butler, D. (2008, October 20). *Turkish court starts hearing high-profile coup case*. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkish-court-starts-hearing-high-profile-coup-case-idUSTRE49J2IF/

Cutler, D. (2013, October 9). *Factbox: What was Turkey's 'Sledgehammer' trial?* Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/world/factbox-what-was-turkeys-sledgehammer-trial-idUSBRE9980O2/

Cyprus Mail. (2016, December 29). *The peace processes: 2004 Annan Plan*. Cyprus Mail. https://archive.cyprus-mail.com/2016/12/29/peace-plans-2004-annan-plan/

de Bendern, P. (2008, July 31). *Turkish AK Party court victory is double-edged sword*. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkish-ak-party-court-victory-is-double-edged-sword-idUSL1552149/

Finkel, A. (2013, December 26). *Turkey's Erdoğan replaces 10 ministers*. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/de9843ec-6d65-11e3-9d9b-00144feabdc0

Gentleman, A. (2004, October 2). *French public given veto on Turkey's EU membership*. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/02/eu.france

Giannotta, V., Çubukçuoğlu, S. S., & Al Qutbah, S. (2024, October 7). *Looking at Turkish foreign policy under the AKP rule*. TRENDS Research & Advisory. https://trendsresearch.org/insight/looking-at-turkish-foreign-policy-under-the-akp-rule

Goksedef, E. (2024, January 2). *What is behind Turkey's staunch support for Hamas in Gaza? BBC News Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67861266*

Hasan, M. (2012, June 10). *In Turkey the right to free speech is being lost*. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/10/turkey-free-speech-erdogan-crackdown

Letsch, C. (2012, April 25). *Tough times for Turks on border with Syria*. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/25/tough-times-turks-border-syria

Martin, G. (2013, June 3). *Turmoil in Istanbul: Guy Martin at Turkey's Gezi Park Protests. Time*. https://time.com/3800017/turmoil-in-istanbul-guy-martin-at-turkeys-gezi-park-protests/

Nelson, M. (n.d.). *Barack Obama: Foreign affairs*. Miller Center https://millercenter.org/president/obama/foreign-affairs

News Agencies (2016, June 27). *Erdogan 'sorry' for downing of Russian jet*. Al Jazeera English. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/6/27/erdogan-sorry-for-downing-of-russian-jet

Nye, J. S. (2011). *The Future of Power*. PublicAffairs, p. 208

Özkeçeci-Taner, B., & Akgül Açıkmeşe, S. (Eds.). (2023). *One hundred years of Turkish foreign policy (1923–2023): Historical and theoretical reflections*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-35859-3

The Economist. (2012, February 25). *Turkey's political in-fighting: Erdogan at bay*. *The Economist*. Retrieved from https://www.economist.com/europe/2012/02/25/erdogan-at-bay

Thompson, M. (2015, November 24). *Turkish Downing of Russian Jet Complicates ISIS Fight*. *Time*. Retrieved from https://time.com/4125590/turkey-russian-jet-syria-isis/

Tran, M. (2008, December 29). *Israeli strikes on Gaza: What are the motives?* The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2008/dec/29/israel-gaza-attacks-motives

Ülgen, S. (2011, November 15). *Turkey's "Zero Problems" Problem*. Project Syndicate. https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2011/11/turkeys-zero-problems-problem?lang=en

Uras, U. (2013, December 24). *Turkish probe marks AKP-Gülen power struggle*. *Al Jazeera English*. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2013/12/24/turkish-probe-marks-akp-gulen-power-struggle

Villelabeitia, I. (2009, May 8). *Ex-Turkish army chief says "e-coup" justified*. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/ex-turkish-army-chief-says-e-coup-justified-idUSTRE5471UQ/

Chapter 4

Primary Sources

ABC News. (2020, June 21). *Egypt's Sisi orders army to prepare amid tensions over Libya*. ABC News. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-21/egypts-sisi-orders-army-to-prepare-amid-tensions-over-libya/12377566

BBC News. (2016, August 11). *Trump insists 'Obama is founder of IS'*. BBC https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36927524

Cagaptay, S. (2006, February 16). *Hamas Visits Ankara: The AKP Shifts Turkey's Role in the Middle East*. The Washington Institute. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hamas-visits-ankara-akp-shifts-turkeys-role-middle-east

Cagaptay, S. (2019). *Erdoğan's failure on the Nile*. *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/erdogans-failure-on-the-nile/

Clinton, H. (2012, November 20). *Remarks With Foreign Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr*. U.S. Department of State. https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/11/200960.htm

C-SPAN. (2009, June 4). *President Obama speech to Muslim world in Cairo* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_889oBKkNU

Erdoğan, R. T. (2020, January 18). *The road to peace in Libya goes through Turkey*. *Politico*. https://www.politico.eu/article/road-to-peace-in-libya-goes-through-turkey-khalifa-haftar/

Iyibilgi. (2012, November 18). *Erdoğan ve Mursi İsrail'i uyardı* [Erdoğan and Morsi warned Israel] https://www.iyibilgi.com/?haber,277059

Reuters. (2007, June 24). *Angry Egypt says Hamas Gaza takeover was a coup*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/article/world/middle-east/angry-egypt-says-hamas-gaza-takeover-was-a-coup-idUSL23637408/

Shadid, A. (2011, September 18). *Turkey predicts partnership with Egypt as regional anchors*. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/19/world/middleeast/turkey-predicts-partnership-with-egypt-as-regional-anchors.html

Shenker, J. (2011, September 13). *Turkey rallies Arab world*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/13/turkey-rallies-arab-world

Secondary Sources

Ali, A. (2012, July 22). *Egypt's stake in the Syrian revolution*. openDemocracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/egypts-stake-in-syrian-revolution/

Al Jazeera. (2013, March 19). *Gaddafi aide surrenders after Cairo firefight*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/3/19/gaddafi-aide-surrenders-after-cairo-firefight

Al Jazeera. (2018, January 7). *Egypt hosts 'told to convince viewers' over Jerusalem*. *Al Jazeera*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/1/7/egypt-hosts-told-to-convince-viewers-over-jerusalem

Aydın-Düzgit, S. (2014, July 24). *The seesaw friendship between Turkey's AKP and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2014/07/the-seesaw-friendship-between-turkeys-akp-and-egypts-muslim-brotherhood?lang=en

Ceyhun, H. E. (2018). *Turkey in the Middle East: Findings from the Arab Barometer* (Working Paper). Arab Barometer. https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Turkey.pdf

Cousin, E. (2024, September 5). *'Better together': Presidents of Egypt, Turkey seek common ground in Ankara*. Al Jazeera https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/5/better-together-presidents-of-egypt-turkey-seek-common-ground-in-ankara

Drolet, J.-F. (2010, June 21). *A liberalism betrayed? American neoconservatism and the theory of international relations.* Journal of Political Ideologies https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232862193_A_Liberalism_Betrayed_American_Neoconservatism_and_the_Theory_of_International_Relations

Fouskas, V. (2022). *Economic drivers of Turkey's foreign policy and the issue of "strategic autonomy" (sub-imperialism)* Yaşar University, Center for Asia–Turkey Studies (CATS) https://cms.yasar.edu.tr/tr/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CATS-Policy-Paper-3-2022.pdf

Hof, F. C. (2014, November 10). *Reassuring the Supreme Leader*. Atlantic Council https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/reassuring-the-supreme-leader/

Kirkpatrick, D. (2018, January 6). *Tapes Reveal Egyptian Leaders' Tacit Acceptance of Jerusalem Move. The New York Times https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/06/world/middleeast/egypt-jerusalem-talk-shows.html*

Lacroix, S. (2016, November). *Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: The Politics of Hizb al-Nour*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/11/egypts-pragmatic-salafis-the-politics-of-hizb-al-nour?lang=en

Melcangi, A. (2021, June 1). *Egypt recalibrated its strategy in Libya because of Turkey*. Atlantic Council https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-recalibrated-its-strategy-in-libya-because-of-turkey/

Pelham, N. (2011). *Gaza's tunnel phenomenon: The unintended dynamics of Israel's siege*. Institute for Palestine Studies; and Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy* https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/42605

Reuters. (2018, November 4). Egypt's Sisi says army will defend Gulf Arabs in case of direct threat. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-gulf-sisi/egypts-sisi-says-army-will-defend-gulf-arabs-in-case-of-direct-threat-newspaper-idUSKCN1NB1HI/

Şener, M. B. (n.d.). *Turkish-Egyptian relations after 2011: Political dynamics of geopolitical turbulence*. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies* https://epa.oszk.hu/04300/04399/00009/pdf/EPA04399_jceeas_2023_2_109-127.pdf

Stein, Ewan. (2025, May 30). *Egyptian responses to Turkey's MENA policy from the Arab Spring to the Gaza crisis: Sub-imperialisms and regional order*. *International Politics* https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41311-025-00699-5

Sukkarieh, M. (2024, December 23). *Will the rapprochement unlock the full potential of the Eastern Mediterranean's natural gas wealth?* ISPI (Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale) https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/will-the-rapprochement-unlock-the-full-potential-of-the-eastern-mediterraneans-natural-gas-wealth-194778