PARAMETERS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE AKP GOVERNMENTS

Nur Bilge Criss[1]
Bilkent University, Ankara

Abstract:

The study employs a critical approach to the parameters of Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP governments. Having abandoned all learning experience from the past, AKP tries to score points in foreign policy through sheer populism. Frenzied activity abroad points not to active or new foreign policy, but to loss of priorities. Foreign policy rhetoric is carried out by the Prime Minister, President, and the Foreign Minister, who sometimes contradict each other. Contrasting the new populist criteria injected into the art and science of traditional foreign policy, the study concludes that all the recent initiatives taken by the government may be noble in spirit, but lacking of sophistication and managerial acumen.

Keywords: history, policy, economy, populism and rhetoric.

Resumen:

Este estudio emplea un acercamiento crítico a los parámetros de la política exterior turca bajo los gobiernos del AKP. Habiendo abandonado toda experiencia aprendida del pasado, el AKP intenta marcar puntos en su política exterior a través del populismo. Una actividad frenética en el exterior no apunta a una política exterior activa o novedosa, sino más bien a una pérdida de intereses. La retórica de la política exterior es llevada a cabo por el primer ministro, el presidente y el ministro de exteriores, quienes en ocasiones se contradicen los unos a los otros. Contrastando estos nuevos criterios de populismo injertados dentro del arte de la política exterior de corte tradicional, este estudio concluye que todas las iniciativas recientemente tomadas por el gobierno pueden ser nobles en sus motivaciones, pero carentes de sofisticación y de buena gestión.

Palabras clave: *Historia, política, economía, populismo y retórica*.

[1] Nur Bilge Criss is Assistant Professor at Bilkent University in Ankara and Editorial Board Member of such journals as Turkish Studies (London), The Middle East Review of International Affairs, Journal of Central Asian Studies, and Contributing Editor of The Journal of American History.

1. Introduction

Currently there are three ways of evaluating Ankara's foreign policies. One is an extremely hostile approach, which goes to the extreme by questioning Turkey's reliability as a NATO member, the other is skeptical and the third adopts a pragmatic, self-centered, as well as self-congratulatory way of explaining the proximate hyper activism. This study takes up the second view because what follows does not leave much alternative to thinking that experience is being surrendered to hope. Since colleagues who contribute to this special edition will write about specific bilateral and/or regional issues, this essay on parameters dwells on foreign policy thinking, conduct, and rhetoric. The framework is the use and abuse of history, foreign policy and the state of the economy, as well as an assessment of dilemmas that the conduct of foreign policy currently presents.

The image projected abroad by the AKP's pro-activism, especially at the expense of old alignments, caused much consternation as to whether Turkey was changing sides. Turkey is not changing direction, because no government can afford to do so. Priorities may always have to be re-directed under changing junctures, but AKP does not seem to have priorities. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's latest declarations practically suggest that Turkey will be globally omnipresent and omnipotent.[2] AKP is merely trying to score points in foreign policy through populism. Contrasting the new populist criteria injected to the art and science of traditional foreign policy making, the study concludes that all of the recent initiatives taken by the government may be noble in spirit, but innocent of sophistication and managerial acumen.

Populism and sophistry towards the Middle East, a hopeful start towards normalizing relations with the Republic of Armenia, pragmatic initiative taking in Africa, reactive rhetoric towards the West (including Israel) describe the overall approach to foreign policy behavior during the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (henceforth AKP) government rule.

However, many, if not all policies towards the neighborhood build on what had been established before the AKP came to power. This "new" foreign policy was not spirited out of the ether except for its contours and rhetoric. Therefore, what is being presented as "the new" foreign policy is hardly new. The only novelties are the conjuncture, style and discourse which shun traditional rules of conduct, engagement, and protocol. This stems from the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's self-centered behavior as well as his disdain for diplomatic/statesmanly finesse. In 2008, since Ahmet Davutoğlu, former professor of international relations, was appointed foreign minister, populism has been wrapped in concepts such as "strategic depth," "zero problems with neighbors," "pro-activism," "geographical centralism" and "soft balancing." Davutoğlu had been senior foreign policy adviser to the government since its inception (2002) and policies were always amalgamated with his conceptualizations. Meanwhile the government broke a good deal of political china, alienated Israel and Azerbaijan, many in the U.S.A., and the European Union (EU). The AKP triumvirate (President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu) seem to pave the foreign policy road seemingly with good intentions by abandoning caution and credible distance.

A lot of energy goes into taking initiatives in selectively cultivating deeper relations with countries in the Middle East, as well as Libya. Newspapers reported in November 2009

[2] "Davutoğlu: Hattı diplomasi yoktur sathı diplomasi vardır, satıh ise tüm dünyadır", [Davutoğlu: There are no limits to our diplomacy, it covers the entire world], *Radikal*, January 5, 2010.

that Turkey will be opening up to Africa in cooperation with Libya. In December 2009, following Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Ankara, Egypt was added to the list of strategic partners in the military, social and economic fields.[3] Less than a week later, taking liberty with Greece's economic crisis, Davutoğlu suggested that the two neighbors should establish a high level strategic partnership, cultivate a common block within the EU, as well as develop regional and global cooperation. All of this, according to the foreign minister, would happen if Turkey helped out Greece financially.[4] Even the mere suggestion of economic aid from Turkey to an EU member is stranger than life. Besides, as of December 22, 2009 Moody's had not yet dropped Greece's financial rating to a crisis level.[5]

While there is nothing necessarily peculiar with pro-activism with the goal of becoming a regional power, the oddity is simultaneous engagement with almost all the near and not-so-near neighborhood. Consequently, Turkey looks as if it no longer has any priorities in foreign relations. The situation is rather confusing for observers, foreign and Turks alike, because no one is sure which path Turkey will follow, if and when it may come to making choices. Simultaneous engagement with more than one partner makes the body disease prone in medical terms. A similar situation may make the body politic just as vulnerable.

In recent years, the government boasted strategic partnership with the US, the Russian Federation, Israel, Azerbaijan, Iraq and Syria, which renders the concept null and void. There is some talk about integration with Syria[6] and the unfortunate reference to "Şamgen" following the lifting of visa requirements between the two countries (Şam is the Turkish word for Damascus), a pique at the exhausting and exhaustive visa procedures of the EU. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu refers to the rise of a new Mesopotamian civilization. It is rather awkward to declare a new civilization when Mesopotamia was the cradle of civilization thousands of years ago.

This study is a follow-up on "Turkey's Foreign and Security Policy with the AKP Government,"[7] which covered the years 2002-2006. That article was critical of the self-centered style of carrying out personal diplomacy by the AKP leadership which was, to a large extent, based on religious worldviews and values. At the same time, to its credit, the AKP carried out reform legislation to conform to EU's Copenhagen criteria, complied with fiscal discipline, and enhanced trade and development, albeit as a continuation of previous policies. That article concluded: Systemic changes have been apparent since the late twentieth century. One positive result of this transformation was the way the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) adapted itself to the new security environment, as well as to the EU vocation, albeit incrementally. Another outcome is the changing mood of the society. Public service is no longer regarded as the premise of bureaucracies, and this resonates in increased democratic participation through NGOs and civil associations. There is ample evidence that societal and institutional inertia, coupled with international incentive, is transforming society. The AKP

[3] "Mısır'la hedef stratejik ortaklık", [Strategic partnership with Egypt] *Radikal*, 16 December 2009.
[4] Karan, Ceyda: "Karşı Kıyıya Topyekün açılım vakti", [Time to open up to the coast across the sea] *Radikal*, 12 December 2009.
[5] *BBC World News TV*, 22 December 2009.
[6] Güzel, Hasan Celâl: "Suriye ile tam entegrasyona doğru", [Towards total integration with Syria] *Radikal*, 15 October 2009.
[7] Criss, Nur Bilge: in Marquina, Antonio and Aydın Mustafa (eds.) (2006): *Turkish Foreign and Security Policy; Its Environs in Eurasia and the Middle East*, Madrid, UNISCI, pp. 23-46.

government has the obligation to rise to the occasion, but there is scant evidence so far that this is in the purview of its leadership.[8] Why?

Is this outlook not overly skeptical given that AKP's is a majority rule, unhampered by coalition partners? Why is the government not concentrating on good governance at home instead of engaging in frenzied activity abroad? Does the answer plausibly lie in the fact that AKP has not come of age about consensual democracy, but instead insists on majority democracy; and when that fails, tries to score points with an imaginary grand strategy in foreign policy?

Although the government had four different foreign ministers during its tenure, namely Yaşar Yakış, Abdullah Gül, Ali Babacan, and lately Ahmet Davutoğlu, the party leaders' self-centered style and monopoly of foreign policy has not changed.

In line with strategic depth, the government decided to adopt the concepts in a book by that very name, written by Ahmet Davutoğlu in 2001 before he was recruited as the senior foreign policy adviser.[9] One of the most appealing tools to be utilized in the book was Ankara's potential to use its soft power in the former Ottoman geography. On an idealistic plane, Davutoğlu wrote about a system akin to a commonwealth in the Middle East, with Turkey at its center. In practice this approach was taken definitely to tantalize collective memory, which in turn served domestic populism.[10]

2. History, Neo-Ottomanism and Politics

One of the main principles of foreign policy making is not to use decision-making as an instrument of populist domestic policies. When foreign policy is based on populism/public opinion it leads to confusion, hurts credibility, and results in loss of prestige. For instance, many foreign analysts look at opinion polls to explain Turkey's foreign policy. When Pew polls point to negative attitudes of the West, then analysts rush to match these numbers with AKP's eastern and southward demarches or the Turks' disappointment with EU's exclusivit rhetoric. To the contrary, in 2003 the AKP leadership pressured the parliament to pass the resolution to accommodate US troops for a northern attack on Iraq. This ran totally against public opinion, and although the resolution did not pass, it was only short by two votes. The ruling party did not take public opinion into account then, any more than it later has been doing. It is again for entirely populist reasons to cater to businessmen, to cover for the declining state of the economy, as well as attempt to fill the so-called power vacuum yet to be created by US withdrawal of troops from Iraq, that AKP has re-directed its attention to the east and south of the borders.

A legitimizing tool for the re-direction in behavior was found in historic references. Historians cringe every time a politician, no matter from which country refers to history. However, the use and abuse of history has come to the fore in AKP rhetoric.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 46.
[9] Davutoğlu, Ahmet (2001): *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position], İstanbul, Küre Yayınları.
[10] *Ibid*., pp. 556-557; Davutoğlu, Ahmet: "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10., no. 1 (2008), pp. 77-96.

Neo-Ottomanism had surfaced in the 1990s for the first time, during Turgut Özal's prime ministry and presidency. After his demise in 1993, the concept was dropped and foreign policy concentrated on security against the terrorist threat emanating from the PKK (Kurdestan Workers' Party). As of 2002, concepts such as using soft power and naturalization of foreign policy as well as the further democratization of the country were revived. At the same time, these concepts were/are used anachronistically to criticize the "Kemalist" foreign policy, which accordingly had severed Turkey's ties with the Middle East and blocked democratization at home. Never mind that the Middle Eastern countries were not receptive to Turkey before or during the Cold War. The status quo based on defensive instincts would no longer do in a globalized world. "In other words, neo-Ottomanism foresaw a comprehensive transformation which required a new definition of Kemalism, politics, society, and identities. The first goal was to soften the approach to secularism, and second to solve the Kurdish problem, not with Kemalist/assimilationist measures, but through brotherhood in religion."[11] Along with this approach was Turkey's soft power which emphasized re-direction of its diplomacy, economy, cultural and historic ties. The only arena that AKP's approach became operational at least on paper is the Middle East. Consequently, domestic and foreign policies overlapped, again at least in theory.

AKP member of the Parliament and member of the Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Affairs, Suat Kınıklıoğlu wrote "While the neo-Ottoman outlook naturally embraces the Ottoman geopolitical space and has no qualms about being a proactive actor in this geography, the traditionally conservative foreign policy establishment remains reluctant to come out of the comfort of not being a significant player…Yet the rise and rapid embrace of neo-Ottoman thinking in foreign policy cannot be explained by the impact of events in our immediate neighborhood only. The ascendancy of Ottomanism in Turkish society is likely to continue for some time. The challenge for Turkey followers will be to see whether neo-Ottomanism will be able to turn into a coherent and well-articulated ideology that will provide the intellectual legitimacy to transform Turkey both domestically and regionally. One thing is for certain though – Osman is recovering and is on his way to being fully liberated from the prevalent ideological interpretation that did much injustice to him."[12] The allegory is commendable as sophistry, except in reality, nobody in Turkey has any problems with Osman Bey, founder of the Ottoman dynasty.

A trajectory of re-direction in foreign and domestic policy involved the Ottoman past. History became the first casualty. It is not unusual for politicians to resurrect the past in order to justify current policy, but the problem is that they usually rely on false analogies and uninformed concepts for domestic consumption. The AKP discourse is not an exception.

Abdullah Gül, as foreign minister of Turkey, in 2006 rendered a speech at a local party convention whereby he made an effort to justify the political bureau chief of Hamas, Khalid Mashal's visit to Ankara. He said Turks were not cognizant of the country's greatness, and asked who is better situated than ourselves to engage in the Palestinian problem. "We possess all of the deeds and archives of Palestine, Israel, Jerusalem, and all of this geography…We made a gift of all these [deeds] to Palestine last year."[13]

[11] Uzgel, İlhan: "Dış Politikada AKP: Stratejik Konumdan Stratejik Modele" [AKP's Foreign Policy: From Strategic Position to Strategic Model], in Uzgel, İlhan and Duru, Bülent (eds.) (2009): *AKP Kitabı. Bir Dönüşümün Bilançosu* [The AKP. An Account of Transformation], Ankara, Phoenix, pp. 357-380; 358-359.
[12] Kınıklıoğlu, Suat: "The return of Ottomanism", *Today's Zaman*, 27 March 2007.
[13] Özbaran, Salih: "Filistin'in Tapusu", [The Deeds of Palestine] *Radikal İki*, 26 February 2006.

The Foreign Minister understood the word "deed" to mean property ownership documents. Alas, in the Ottoman system deed registers (*tapu sicil defterleri*) informed the State of household statistics based on counting the head of household for the purpose of taxation. Households to be taxed were on *mîrî* (public) land which had little if anything to do with private property. Furthermore, information on these registers was published by historians Uriel Heyd, Bernard Lewis and Amnon Cohen as well as K. Abdulfattah and W. Hütleroth, among others. *Arz-ı mîrî* or *mîrî* lands for short constituted 90 percent of the total lands in the Empire. Some cultivable lands were rented out to persons called *öşriyye* who paid a special tax, *öşür* to the state.[14] Gül, however, implied that Turkey has a say over the former Ottoman provinces because these deeds are in the Istanbul archives.

It is one thing, wrote Özbaran, to utilize the archives of the Ottoman Empire as a legacy to write demographic, economic, social, and diplomatic history of the imperial geography. But it is totally a different matter to construct a "new" foreign policy for Turkey, based on the archives through falsified terminology.[15] In fact, property rights should be searched in United Nations' archives during and after the time of partition of Palestine, not in the Ottoman archives.[16]

Nonetheless, obviously misunderstanding of the deed issue must have given false hope to some Palestinians. In 2009, upon being evicted from his home in east Jerusalem, which had been his family homestead since 1956, a Palestinian announced that since his attorney could not find any proof of ownership in the archives delivered to Palestine, he would go to Istanbul to look at deeds in the archives.[17]

In December 2009, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu complained in an interview that he did not appreciate being labeled as neo-Ottomanist.[18] But the content of his former publications are not commensurate with his current "idealist" approach, especially when he was the instigator of soft power extension to the former Ottoman geography.[19] Neo-Ottomanism, whatever it means, does not go over well in 2009 because the term is being used in myriad publications as a point of criticism toward Turkey's new foreign policy. But, three years ago it found a receptive audience at home when combined with historic myths, nationalism, and religion beyond sectarianism.

In 2006, then State Minister Kürşad Tüzmen stated that the AKP government wished to cultivate a relationship with peoples who once lived in the Ottoman geography based on respect and cooperation. He emphasized that more than 30 countries which occupy a space of 24 million square kilometers need a strong center; and this center must be Turkey. Brussels is

[14] İnalcık, Halil (2000): *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Ekonomik ve Sosyal Tarihi* [Socio-economic History of the Ottoman Empire], 1st ed., İstanbul, Eren Yayıncılık, p. 147.
[15] See Özbaran, *op. cit.*
[16] Land tenure in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire continued as is from ancient times as opposed to land tenure in the Balkans. Privately owned lands in Palestine were sold to Jewish émigrés by absentee Arab landlords at the end of the 19th century against all efforts to prevent this by the Porte. See, Öke, M. Kemal: "The Ottoman Empire, Zionism, and the Question of Palestine (1880-1908)", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (August 1982), pp. 329-341.
[17] "Doğu Kudüs için Osmanlı arşivi umudu", [Hope lies in the Ottoman archives for east Jerusalem] *Radikal*, 6 December 2009.
[18] Karan, Ceyda: "Batı'nın emperyal perspektifinden Yeni Osmanlılık", [Neo-Ottomanism from the western imperial perspective] *Radikal*, 7 December 2009.
[19] Davutoğlu, Ahmet: "Medeniyetler arası Etkileşim ve Osmanlı Sentezi", [Inter-civilizational dialogue and the Ottoman synthesis] in Çakır, Ç. (ed.) (2005): *Osmanlı Medeniyeti: Siyaset, İktisat, Sanat*, [Ottoman Civilization: Politics, Economy, and the Arts], İstanbul, Klasik Yayınları, pp. 3-13.

just as important to the AKP as are Baghdad, Aleppo, Cairo and Tabriz, he said. The last of which should not have even been touched upon considering that Tabriz is the center of southern Azerbaijan and Iran has always been very sensitive about its Azerbaijani Turks. However, according to the Minister, Turkey should combine three sets of countries, the EU, Turkic republics in Central Asia, and the Arab countries within the overall theme called the "Great Ottoman Project."[20]

The notion of being co-religionists with the Kurds domestically also inspired, among other factors, the democratic initiatives taken towards ending the twenty-five year long PKK terrorism. It was a fine initiative but because the AKP did not seek consensus at the level of major political parties to agree on basic premises, it caused another sense of polarization between autonomy seeking Turkish Kurds and the non-Kurds.[21] The PM did not even acknowledge let alone begin a dialogue with the (Kurdish) Democratic Turkey Party (DTP) about the very issue that concerned the legally elected representatives of the Kurds. Erdoğan's avoidance of the DTP caused the radical elements of the party to turn to Abdullah Öcalan, former head of the PKK who is serving a life sentence in Turkey. Tension culminated in the decision by the Constitutional Court to close the DTP in December 2009. Protests and restiveness followed and are continuing. AKP's hubris and unilateralism caused much instability at home, which is not very promising for foreign affairs either.

Some jumped on the bandwagon to argue that the Republic of Turkey is a mere continuation of the Ottoman Empire, where major let alone minor differences were overlooked for the sake of expediency, in tandem with the "new"outlook.[22] Concomitantly, the doyen of Ottoman history, Professor Halil İnalcık (who was awarded the Medal of Honor by the Parliament in 2008) stated "We are not Ottomans. The Empire resided on minorities. We cannot replicate it, this is a nation-state. The former was an empire."[23] His was a reaction not to democratization but to suggestions to confer minority status to Turkey's Kurds. Actually, it would be very beneficial to study İnalcik's scholarship before speaking of identity politics or alluding to the empire.

In sum, naming is a very effective political tool, and journalistic, policy analyses and academic writings reflect a high state of confusion about a reasonable diagnosis of Turkey's foreign policies. This may plausibly be due to the term first concocted during the Bush administration referring to the so-called pro-American Muslim majority countries as "moderate Islamic" countries. This terminology overlapped with AKP rule in Turkey, whose members come from politically oriented religious backgrounds. Public pronouncements of Prime Minister Erdoğan reacting to criticism of embracing Sudan's dictator Omar al-Bashir to the effect that Muslims would never commit genocide did not help either. Consequently, one encounters titles such as "The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey", "Turkey's Ottoman Mission", "Neo-Ottomanism is All We Don't Need," "Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalist Foreign Policy", "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism", "The AKP's Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of "Neo-Ottomanism", "Neo-Ottomanism",

[20] See Özbaran, *op. cit.*; Özbaran, Salih (2007): *"Osmanlı'yı Özlemek ya da Tarih Tasarlamak"* [Nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire or Re-designing History], Ankara, İmge Yayınları; Özbaran, Salih: "Sömürü ile Pax Ottomana Arasında Sıkıştırılmış bir konu, Osmanlı Yönetiminde Arap Ülkeleri" [Between Pax Ottomana and Colonialism; Arab Countries under Ottoman Rule], *Toplumsal Tarih*, vol. 189 (September 2009), pp. 12-21.

[21] I use the term non-Kurds deliberately because the rest of Turkey's human profile is a mirror image of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, although ethnic Turks may be in the majority.

[22] Alkan, Türker, "Eski ve Yeni Osmanlılar", [The old and new Ottomans] *Radikal*, 17 November 2009.

[23] *Ibid.*; Bila, Fikret: "Halil İnalcık'ın Uyarısı", [Cautionary note from Halil Inalcık] *Milliyet*, 19 November 2009.

"Shifting Sides? The problems of Neo-Ottomanism" and "Neo-Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy."[24] Further, foreign media, at least the Anglo-Saxon versions continue to qualify AKP and its leadership as pro-Islamic, Islamic, Islamic-oriented, or Islamist *ad nauseam*. There are certain problems with this kind of labeling. In the first place, the authors obviously do not know the difference in lexicon between Islam (the religion), Muslim (the follower), Islamic (adjective as in Islamic architecture), Islamist (somewhat short of a fundamentalist but a proponent of religious worldviews adhering to the Holy Book, when and if possible). Secondly, public labeling of people's faith, which should remain a private affair is incongruous with policy analysis and explanation, because the approach is reductionist as well as simplistic. Last but not least, such clichés may cater to identity politics, but fall short of understanding events. That said, AKP leaders' behavior, rhetoric, and life styles plausibly prompt such labels, but these are not helpful in identifying current political behavior. Identity politics alone is not a sound instrument to decipher politics any more than misplaced historical references are. Instead, we might look at the worldly values of these parvenu statesmen to get some clues about their foreign policy demarches. The next section will take up bilateral relations to draw a reasonable picture of AKP's current foreign policy parameters. One should, however, bear in mind the religious-cultural mettle of the AKP leadership, which sometimes brings dividends to them and at other times, is used against them.

3. Bilateral Relations / Multilateral Implications

From Strategic Partnership to Model Partnership: When the U.S. policy of winning hearts and minds in the aftermath of the Iraq war of 2003 failed to yield much return in the Middle East, the AKP government stepped in to complete the job, not in America's image, but in its own Muslim image. Consequently, AKP adopted a double parlance. One was geared towards the Arab world as a powerful Muslim country which seeks justice in international affairs. The other language was one of a secular, democratic government which respects the rule of law when addressing the West.

We understand from Erdoğan's stormy response to criticism about Turkey's change of axis in foreign policy at the SAIS conference during his visit to Washington D.C. early in

[24] Rabasa, Angel and Larrabee, F. Stephen "The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey", Santa Monica, Ca., Rand Corporation (2008), at http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG726.pdf; Strauss, Delphine: "Turkey's Ottoman mission", *Financial Times*, 23 November 2009, at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/af859474-d868-11de-b63a-00144feabdc0.html?catid=75&SID=google; Medad, Yisrael: "Neo-Ottomanism Is All We Don't Need", *Myrightword* (27 April 2009), at http://myrightword.blogspot.com/2009/04/neo-ottomanism-is-all-we-dont-need.html; Taşpınar, Ömer: "Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalist foreign policy", *Today´s Zaman*, 22 May 2010, at http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/columnists-153882-neo-ottomanism-and-kemalist-foreign-policy.html; Taşpınar, Ömer: "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Carnegie Papers*, No. 10 (September 2008), at http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec10_taspinar_final.pdf; Çağaptay, Soner: "The AKP's Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of "Neo-Ottomanism", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1270; Kanlı, Yusuf: "The EU report", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 14 October 2009 at http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=the-eu-report-2009-10-14; Rubin, Michael: "Shifting Sides? The problems of neo-Ottomanism", Middle East Forum, *National Review* (10 August 2004), at http://www.meforum.org/628/shifting-sides; Fisher Onar, Nora: "Neo-Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy", Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, *Discussion Paper Series*, Istanbul (March 2009), at http://www.edam.org.tr/images/PDF/yayinlar/makaleler/discussion%20paper%20series_fisher.pdf.

December 2009, that there is no diversion in Turkey's foreign policy, but that the EU had diverted from its path.[25] Speaking at another conference, Davutoğlu elaborated on the axis debate, stating that the major axis was Ankara in trying to bring about global peace.[26] On the contrary, although not articulated the new US administration was above scrutiny, plausibly for accommodating the new cultural identity of its Turkish ally. Close to 100,000 civilian casualties in Iraq caused by US attacks, however meekly criticized before, were promptly forgotten. U.S. President Barack Obama welcomed Erdoğan at the Oval Office with the Arabic salute "Salaam 'alaykum." This is not a trivial matter. No western leader ever addressed his/her Turkish counterparts during the 86 years of the republic in this manner.[27] Had they done so, it would have been considered a major diplomatic scandal. Today, it is acceptable as an extension of American public diplomacy directed by misplaced cultural anthropology. It simply signals recognition/promotion of the Muslim cultural identity of Turkey's prime minister. As long as the AKP leadership wears its religious identity on their sleeves at all occasions they will be addressed in this manner, trampling state protocol.

An "embedded" journalist with the Prime Minister's entourage gave credit to Erdoğan for being the first and only leader for having criticized Israel in a Washington, D.C. setting about its isolation of Gaza.[28] Almost at the same breath, the PM iterated that his government wished to sustain strategic partnership with Israel. Likewise, although Turkey did not wish to see a nuclear armed Iran, Ankara was against using sanctions or military force against Tehran. On the one hand, it may be argued that the Turkish PM's peace vision towards the Middle East overlaps with that of the U.S. President. On the other hand, Davutoğlu's principle of "zero problems with neighbors" increasingly looks like a cloak whereby Ankara is trying to solve US's problems in Turkey's neighborhood. Turkey can certainly talk to some parties/countries in its neighborhood that the US officially does not talk to or with those over which Washington no longer has leverage. Ankara used to do this in the past without fanfare.

When Davutoğlu explained Turkey's role in the post Cold War order as that of contributing to the global order by restructuring the sub-regional space around Turkey, [29] it raised questions about one, Turkey's priorities along with its own national self interest, and two, the risks Turkey may be taking by its integrative approach to Syria and Iraq because both have the potential to draw Turkey into the Middle Eastern quagmires. It is one thing to help these two countries become part of the international community, but another to embrace them with much fanfare as long lost brothers. In other words, it is the lack of professionalism and lack of maintaining equidistance from the political parties alike that raise questions about Turkey's "new" foreign policy. The parameters of Turkish foreign policy have been broadened in tandem with American strategic interests.

A report written for the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association of Turkey (TUSIAD) in April 2009, on rebuilding Turkey-US partnership concluded, "Turkey can be of significant assistance to the United States in dealing with the problems of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and the Caucasus, as well as moving the moribund Middle East peace process forward, which will be crucial for rebuilding Turkish-American

[25] "Erdoğan: Eğer eksen kayması varsa bu Avrupa'daki eksen kaymasıdır", [Erdoğan: If there is any diversion from the axis it is the European diversion] *Radikal*, 7 December 2009.
[26] "Artık eksen Türkiye'de", [From now on Turkey is the axis] *Radikal*, 10 December 2009.
[27] Şahin, Haluk: "Selamün aleyküm", [Salaam 'alaykum] *Radikal*, 11 December 2009.
[28] Karan, Ceyda: "ABD'de İsrail'i böyle eleştiren lider gördünüz mü?", [Have you ever seen a leader who criticizes Israel like this in the U.S.A.?] *Radikal*, 9 December 2009.
[29] *Anatolian Agency Bulletin*, quoting Davutoğlu from a speech he made in Princeton University on March 20, 2009 about the objectives of Turkey's foreign policy.

partnership in a new era."[30] This is exactly the geographically extended line which the AKP government follows. But, there are limits to Ankara's soft power. What seems to be working south of the border does not work as well north-east (the Caucasus) where Ankara is forced to take its relations with Russia into account. To say the least, AKP is dependent on Russia's goodwill and calculations in its relations, no matter how sincere it is about its initiative towards Armenia, not to mention its relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan.

The picture drawn here suggests the following: The AKP government searches for legitimacy in its foreign policy behavior through the US administration which, in turn, favors every initiative to remedy its own image in the Middle East. Secondly, AKP leadership has assumed a "big brother" role both in its rhetoric and deeds towards the Middle East, which may backfire sooner than later. Third, favorable economic relations do not always guarantee favorable international relations, but perhaps for once it may work for Turkey in the Middle East in the current conjuncture, barring civil war or another form of war in the region. Fourth, the much used and abused metaphor, "Turkey as a bridge between the East and West" has been revived to account for the Janus-like foreign policies, which render Ankara as the self-appointed middle-man based on personal initiatives. Fifth, although energetic and dynamic, Turkey's foreign policy is being monopolized by the AKP triumvirate, the PM, FM and the President, who bring personal diplomacy to the fore at the expense of dismantling traditional conduct in state affairs. This style may be beneficial for bilateral relations in the short-term, but does not necessarily cater to multilateral confidence building as witnessed by reactions from Iran, Israel, and the EU. The AKP is definitely trying to fill what it perceives as power vacuums in its neighborhood left over from the demise of the Cold War as well as the resultant environment in the Middle East following US engagement in Iraq.

But it is breaking a good deal of political china through rhetoric and behavior such as when President Abdullah Gül retorted that it was none of EU's business if Ankara decided to host Omar al-Bashir of Sudan in Turkey during (this would be the second time) the convention of the Islamic Conference in Istanbul in October 2009. One of Erdoğan's polemical statements was that he had seen no signs of genocide when he visited Darfur in 2008. During his visit to the US in December 2009, he reiterated that Muslims do not commit genocide. Such rhetoric points to double standards per excellence. Does an economically powerful Turkey, as it is being promoted by the government, need to resort to such extremes, if indeed, its economy is as sound as its membership in the G-20 suggests? How else is this frenzied activity in foreign relations to be explained?

4. State of the Economy

In October 2008, PM Erdoğan declared that the global economic crisis was tangential to the Turkish economy. Consequently, no fiscal or economic precautions were taken. Exactly one year later numbers indicate that Turkey is the third country after Russia (-7.5 per cent) and Mexico (-7.3 percent) which experienced the highest percentile of a shrinking economy with -6.5%.

As of 2006, the AKP governments relaxed financial discipline and did not take into account that the crisis would affect the real state sector. When it did, banks became overly

[30] Özel, Soli; Yılmaz, Şuhnaz and Akyüz, Abdullah: "Rebuilding a Partnership: Turkish-American Relations for a New Era, A Turkish Perspective", *TUSIAD Publication* No-T/2009-04/490, p. 90.

cautious about extending credit to commercial firms. Meanwhile the Central Bank pressured the banks into decreasing interest rates concomitant with the public sector appeals to the banks to finance their budget deficits. Banks received no guarantees let alone an answer to the question as to whether they could maintain liquidity or whether the government would seek international funding. Although the government did not refuse to negotiate with the IMF overtly, the AKP has chosen to stretch the negotiations. Even though agreement with IMF would not be a definitive solution to the problem, funds could have been used to buttress the national budget, prevent bankruptcies as well as relieve the shrinking economy.[31] Moreover, the 2009 budget expenditures were geared towards the March 2009 local elections. In this budget, there was a 25 percent ($4 billion) increase in allocations to local administrations. On December 31, 2009 the government announced that a two year agreement of $15 billion with the IMF was about to be signed. The amount is to be used for debt financing.

By November 2009, the unemployment rate was 13.4percent with 3,396,000 people out of a job. According to *The Economist* and OECD figures, Turkey's unemployment rate is the fourth highest globally after South Africa, Lithuania, and Spain.[32] With an annual 1.3 percent population increase, the working age population increases fast, but the unemployment rate is still higher than those who come of age.[33] Having lost touch with reality, Erdoğan has been preaching to Turkish women that they should at least have three children per family, and God would provide for them.[34]

There are more numbers just as adverse as the above. Sixty-four thousand enterprises closed down. Forty-seven percent of prison inmates are debtors who defaulted on checks or promissory notes. During the first 80 years of the Republic, the country had a cumulative debt of $148 billion. The AKP government's debt accumulation reached $285 billion in seven years, $225 billion to be paid in interest. The budget deficit as of November 2009 was $40.3 billion, projected to reach $62.3 billion by the year's end.[35]

The General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity announced that 2.6 million families received aid in cash and kind worth $1.5 million during the first nine months of 2009. This aid precludes free dispensation of textbooks, lunch subsidies to school children, free transportation for handicapped youngsters, and other social service projects.[36] This is significant in terms of poverty levels.

Calibrating the world economy at the end of 2009, the economist Baran Tuncer spoke of G-2, China and the US as the giants of global economy despite the recession in the latter, and economically the most promising country was India. Tuncer contrasted real conditions with AKP's rhetoric in context. "It is not credible to say that Turkey is engaged in initiatives that would make it a grand player in the future despite government rhetoric to the contrary…Besides major players at the global level not only should have a sound economy but a sustainable rate of growth."[37] The growth rates that Turkey boasted before the global

[31] Gürses, Uğur: "10 Maddede 'Teğet'in Yıldönümü", [Anniversary of the 'tangential' in 10 points] *Radikal*, 21 October 2009.
[32] "The World in 2010", *The Economist* (December 2009), p. 100.
[33] "İşsizlik yüzde 13.4'e demir attı, işsiz sayısı 3 milyon 396 bine çıktı", [Unemployment is 13.4%, 3 million 396 thousand people are unemployed] *Radikal*, 16 December 2009.
[34] "Erdoğan: En az üç cocuk doğurun", [Give birth to at least three children] *Hürriyet*, 7 March 2008.
[35] Türenç, Tufan: "İşte Tayyip Bey'in Türkiyesi", [This is Tayyip Bey's Turkey] *Hürriyet*, 23 November 2009.
[36] "10 milyon kişi yardımla yaşıyor", [Ten million people survive on social aid] *Radikal*, 24 December 2009.
[37] Tuncer, Baran: "Bir on yıl daha geride kalırken", [Another decade is gone] *Radikal*, 27 December 2009.

economic crisis depended on the flow of foreign investment which is no longer available, and as such these rates had been a misleading indicator of growth.

In the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis Turkey benefited from the financial expansion in international markets and cheap credit. Foreign debt deficits were met by foreign investments attracted to Turkey because of high interest rates. Merger of firms and privatization which brought direct investments also contributed to deficit financing. Subsequently, the private sector became the major debtor and the industries succumbed to recession.[38]

Deficit financing by acquiring foreign debt feeds the current account deficit and unemployment. On the one hand, it seems unrealistic to turn to labor intensive production at the expense of imported technologies, because business is here to make profits, not to provide social justice. On the other hand, neo-liberal policies are also bankrupt mainly because of unregulated financial markets and abstract gains, without any correlation to real-time value.

The AKP government turned to its Middle Eastern neighborhood to boost business. "Turkey heavily relies on economic instruments in improving relations with its neighbors. The economic instruments, mainly trade and investment projects, are used as facilitators in foreign policy [in line with the new foreign policy paradigm, the "zero problem policy" with neighbors]."[39] That neighborhood is rife with many interrelated disputes. The government, however, appears to treat international affairs as if they were items of dispute in some business deal. As a result, Erdoğan attempted to mediate the peace process between Syria and Iraq, Israel and Palestine, and facilitate talks between Iran and the Western world. It may be too soon to evaluate the outcomes, but even if the self-assumed role of mediator or facilitator helps make a dent in disputes, then it will have been worthwhile. Consequently, conclusions dwell on dilemmas that Turkey's foreign policy activism presents.

5. Conclusions

Dilemmas are manifold. In the first place, Turkey overtly took Iran's side on the nuclear issue and the PM announced that the nuclear program is intended for peaceful means. Iran not only presents, at least in rhetoric, a threat to Israel. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Yemen also see Tehran as a threat. While Kuwait saw Saddam Husein's Iraq as a threat, and rightfully so, now it perceives a nuclear Iran as a threat. Iran's support for Shi'i Arabs in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, the Gulf countries, and Yemen poses security problems. Islamic fundamentalists in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine receive military aid from Iran. Tehran's missile range has increased steadily. Turkey's government, however, does not have a nuanced outlook in foreign policy, and ignores the dichotomies prevalent in its behavior.

Turkey's influence in the Arab countries might have been positively viewed in the hope of offsetting Iran. There was hope in the Arab countries that NATO member Turkey will

[38] Yeldan, Erinç: "Küresel Kriz: Yapısal Nedenleri ve Türkiye Ekonomisine Etkileri", [Global Crisis: Structural Causes and Effects on the Turkish Economy], Speech delivered at the Kocaeli University and Kocaeli Bar Association Conference, İzmit (9 May 2009). Courtesy of Professor Yeldan.
[39] Kutlay, Mustafa: "Is Turkey Drifting Away from the West? An Economic Interpretation", *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, October 28, 2009, at http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3212.

balance Iran.[40] On the one hand, this is exactly the direction that may embroil Turkey in intra-Arab-Iran disputes. On the other, AKP's support for Iran does not fare well with its close relations with the Arab countries. Turkey's sale of weapons to the Gulf countries along with its support for Iran, enhanced economic relations with Arab countries as well as Iran, present a serious dilemma and heralds loss of credibility in the foreign policy arena.

Second, enhanced relations with the Kurdestan autonomous region in northern Iraq did not yield much cooperation from Masud Barzani. What still counts is the US-Turkey cooperation in obtaining real-time intelligence on PKK camps in that region. Otherwise, Barzani keeps the logistical routes to PKK camps open and keeps a choice in the matter. Whether the central Iraqi government can rise above sectarianism is another issue with which to contend.

Third, fifty-one agreements were signed with Syria on health, trade, local administration, energy, the environment, agriculture, tourism, education, culture, and defense in the name of inter-regional cooperation. Visa requirements were lifted to help businessmen. Davutoğlu maintained that the foreign ministry was applying the EU model (of eliminating borders and entry visas, as well as establishing common air routes between Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Jordan) towards the Middle East with Syria being the pilot project.[41] Apart from the false analogy of the EU model in the Middle East, two questions linger. One is at what point will the US relieve Syria from its list of terrorist states as well as whether Syrian entry stamps on Turkish citizen's passports will impede obtaining visas to the West. Yet another question is about problems that might occur if and when terrorists of different affiliations enter Turkey, because now their space for maneuver has been expanded.

Fourth, the Russia-Georgia conflict clearly showed that Turkey's "strategic depth" tool is not going to work towards its northern neighborhood. During this conflict, Erdoğan attempted to broker an armistice between the warring parties, only to find out that the French President Nicholas Sarkozy had already brokered one. In the aftermath of military conflict in summer 2008, Erdoğan offered a peace project under the banner of the Caucasian Stability Pact. The pact was designed to bring Russia and Georgia together to a platform and seek a solution to disputes over south Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Russian PM, Vladimir Putin, reacted furiously to the proposal and the Georgian Foreign Ministry refused the proposal as well. Currently, Russia and Georgia are holding talks in Geneva while both countries made it crystal clear that Turkey will not become a party to *their* conflict or to its resolution.

Like with every other diplomatic initiative monopolized by the AKP, the pattern followed is to advertise Turkey's intentions up front without necessarily being invited by disputing parties to facilitate/mediate, and then expect instant results. One of the golden rules of diplomacy is to keep such initiatives confidential because otherwise nobody will take it seriously. It is only when and if the solution or partial solution is near that the parties make the process public. In other words, consensus is reached privately so that if a resolution becomes impossible nobody's prestige will be at stake. This is exactly what is meant here by criticizing the AKP for having dismantled the international rules of conduct and engagement.

Fifth, structurally speaking, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have sufficient numbers of personnel to sustain the current activism. The Ministry has 1,200

[40] Zeyrek, Deniz: "İran denkleminde bir sorun var", [Problems with the Iranian equation] *Radikal*, 29 December 2009.
[41] Çalışkan, Emre: "Türkiye, AB modelini Ortadoğu'da uyguluyor", [Turkey is applying the EU model in the Middle East], *Radikal*, 3 January 2010.

diplomats. Davutoğlu stated that the Office of the Undersecretary was working on a plan to restructure the Ministry whereby the number of diplomats recruited will increase, and non-career experts will be hired. Junior diplomats are already required to learn Arabic or Persian in addition to a Western language.[42] Such reforms are sorely needed at the Ministry with the caveat that quality is not sacrificed at the altar of quantity; simply because AKP has a penchant for building cadres. The question also remains as to how this expansion will be financed.

"What causes concern – in the West but also among critical thinkers in Turkey –" wrote an analyst, "is Ankara's ability to pursue its ambitious international conduct, maintaining both the depth and the breadth of its foreign policy course. Given the sheer number of problems, enormity of the tasks, complexity of the regions, tangled nature of conflicts, coupled with Ankara's limited resources and the new constraints imposed by the current economic recession, a certain downsizing of the Turkish foreign policy agenda appears to be inevitable. Will Turkey not be compelled, critics argue, to scale down its ambitions, and prioritize and zero in on a carefully selected set of problems, instead of pursuing an all-azimuths policy?"[43] The question goes right into the heart of the matter.

Finally, in contrast to the skepticism this article carries, FM Davutoğlu held a press conference on December 31, 2009, explaining his vision of Turkey in 2010. He hopes that Turkey will become one of the top ten economies in the world, that Ankara will be the center for resolving global crises, as well as combine freedoms and security. But, goodwill is not a substitute for mutual political will in international affairs. Foreign policy, moreover, does not consist on diplomacy alone. Tensions between the government, judiciary, military, and security forces pose serious challenges to Turkey's internal stability. The FM at last concedes that the internal situation may tarnish Turkey's credibility abroad if it continues unabated.[44] These tensions will cease in the long run, and Turkey will become a more democratic country, because the top echelons of state institutions are already cooperating to alleviate the ills. This is a matter of survival for the state apparatus. But, a foreign policy line, without priorities, is a more dangerous path to tread. The major threat would be loss of credibility internationally. This may result in alienating the entire Middle East. Worse yet, AKP's self-centered and self-defined foreign policies may upset (if it has not already done so) the Euro-Atlantic balance that Turkey had always been keen on maintaining. This balance tilts towards the Atlantic despite discourse in the West about AKP's "independent" foreign policy acts.[45]

[42] Aydıntaşbaş, Aslı: "Dışişleri by yükü nasıl kaldırır?", [How is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work under such burdens?] *Milliyet*, 14 December 2009.
[43] Ojanen, Hanna: "Is Turkey emerging as an independent regional power", *Europe's World*, 12 April 2009, at http://www.europesworld.org.
[44] Yetkin, Murat: "Dışişleri değişen dengeleri tartışıyor", [Foreign Ministry debates changing equilibriums] *Radikal*, 3 January 2010.
[45] See Ojanen,*op. cit.*; Rachman, Gideon: "The U.S. is losing Turkey", *Financial Times*, 4 January 2010.