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Drivers of Turkish Regional Policy Since 1990

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article vise à évaluer les événements les plus saillants de la politique étrangère turque depuis la fin de la guerre froide. Il est divisé en trois sections principales qui, en prêtant attention aux vecteurs de politique étrangère intérieurs et extérieurs, abordent la politique étrangère turque (PTF) dans les années 1990 et les années 2000-en particulier après l'élection du Parti de la Justice et du Développement (AKP)-et au cours de la période qui a suivi le Printemps arabe, avec un accent sur le grand Moyen-Orient. Enfin, la dernière section tire quelques conclusions générales concernant la relation entre les principales tendances de la PTF au cours de ces trois périodes.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to evaluate the most salient drivers of Turkish foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. It is divided into three main sections that, by paying attention to domestic and external foreign policy drivers, address Turkish foreign policy (TFP) during the 1990s, during the 2000s – particularly after the election of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) – and during the post-“Arab Spring” period, with a focus on the greater Middle East. Lastly, the concluding section draws some general conclusions regarding the relationship between the drivers of TFP during these three periods and comments on what might be in store for Turkey in the near future.

Introduction

The way the Republic of Turkey conducts its external relations is influenced by a series of variables related to geographic, historical, cultural, psychological, economic, societal and international factors, as well as by the different personalities of political and military leaders. In this context, this paper aims to evaluate the most salient drivers of

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Turkish foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. It is divided into three main sections that, by paying attention to domestic and external foreign policy drivers, address Turkish foreign policy (TFP) during the 1990s, during the 2000s – particularly after the election of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) – and during the post-“Arab Spring” period, with a focus on the greater Middle East. Lastly, the concluding section draws some general conclusions regarding the relationship between the drivers of TFP during these three periods and comments on what might be in store for Turkey in the near future.

TFP drivers in the 1990s

Throughout the 1990s TFP was facing a troubled environment both domestically and internationally. Internal political and social instability combined with a severe economic crisis were posing great impediments for TFP decision makers. At the same time the tectonic changes caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union in its near abroad, mainly in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East, had rendered the situation more complex. As a result, TFP was trapped in an identity crisis with regard to its orientation and strategic planning.

Domestic Level

Domestically, political instability was the main feature of Turkish politics in the 1990s. During that period eight coalition governments and two five-month single-party governments were formed. The coalition governments resulted, among other things, in frequent replacements of foreign ministers. Turkey had nine different foreign ministers between July 1994 and June 1997 alone.¹ Under these circumstances, it was very difficult for Turkey to formulate and implement a viable foreign policy strategy. Furthermore, this meant that the National Security Council (NSC), although unelected, was able to direct TFP in terms of hard security thereby preventing a more liberal approach to be realized. This implied that the military was also reluctant to allow the initiation of any democratic and structural reforms that would have enabled Turkey to avoid the severe economic crisis of 2001.² Turkish society was also facing the consequences of the

lack of a homogenous economic development. Income disparities within Turkey were great, “with the population in the southeast having less than half the average national income and the large rural population generally being much poorer than the urban population.”³

The bad condition of Turkish economy throughout the decade, justifies to a large extent the characterization of the 1990s as a “lost decade” for Turkey. Ibrahim Öztürk describes the bad economic environment of the 1990s, that actually led Turkey to its biggest economic crisis in 2001, as characterized by: 1) low and unstable growth; 2) low per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at around 3,400 USD, with a dramatic low productivity across the economic sectors; 3) an unstable fiscal and financial instability at both public as well as private sectors; 4) absence of price stability that fuelled a chronic inflation of almost 70 percent which lasted for more than two decades; 5) and wide spread corruption, lack of competitiveness, and massive unemployment of around 10 percent.⁴

In retrospect, it seems that Turgut Özal’s liberal economic policies during the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s did not manage to reverse the negative conditions that led Turkey to the economic difficulties of the 1990s. Turkish economy deteriorated further when two murderous earthquakes hit the industrial region of Marmara. The economic consequences in fiscal terms of the two earthquakes that struck the Marmara region in 1999, according to the provisional estimations of the Turkish government, amounted to one percent of the Gross National Product in 1999 and two percent in 2000; 5,9 billion USD overall.⁵

During the same time, the Kurdish issue and its management by the Turkish state were also causing serious problems to TFP and especially, as it is be argued below, to Turkey’s bilateral relations with a host of countries and the European Union (EU). Among the secessionist Kurdistan Workers’ Party’s (PKK) tactics were the intimidation against the families of local Kurds who had joined the pro-government militia and assassinating Turkish government employees.⁶ The response of Turkish security forces was also aggressive. In their effort to deny the PKK potential logistical support,

they had burnt down Kurdish villages while 1.5 million people of Kurdish origin have been displaced “amid widespread allegations of torture and extra-judicial executions of suspected PKK sympathizers.”⁷

The situation in South-eastern Turkey had serious negative repercussions on Turkish regional policy. By the mid-1990s Turkey was blaming Iran and especially Syria of supporting PKK militants and their leader, Abdullah Öcalan, while threatening with military action if those policies did not stop. Importantly enough these threat perceptions were largely the reason behind the formation of the Turkish-Israeli alliance after the signing of a number of agreements in 1996. The tentative Turkey-Syria relations peaked in 1998 when Turkey came close to launching a military attack against Syria. Syria was thereby coerced into expelling the PKK leader thus leading Turkey to gradually improve its relations with Syria and Iran.

The Kurdish issue had also influenced Ankara's relations with Brussels. This was mainly manifested in the European Council's Decisions in the 1997 Luxembourg Summit. The disproportionate use of violence and the low Human Rights record surrounding this particular issue prevented in many respects Turkey from being included in the next round of enlargement. The capture, trial and sentence to death of the PKK leader provoked severe criticism on an EU level and a warning that the implementation of the death penalty would drive Ankara further away from Europe.

In parallel to these developments, the socioeconomic conditions within Turkey contributed to the rise of – the already ascending – political Islam. The electoral appeal of political Islam gained significant momentum since the establishment of the Welfare Party (WP) in 1987, though earlier successes can be mentioned such as the participation of Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (MSP) in a 1974 coalition and Özal's election to power. The WP's electoral support grew steadily from 7.2 percent in 1987 to 21.4 percent in 1994, thus rendering it the biggest political party in the Turkish parliament.⁸ In 1996 the WP formed a coalition government with the True Path Party, and its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, became the first Islamist Prime Minister of Turkey.

The Islamic turn in the internal domain of Turkish politics also influenced TFP. Despite a conscious effort by Erbakan not to deviate from traditional western oriented TFP, he made openings to Muslim states under the banner of a more pro-active foreign policy.⁹ The military establishment, however, perceived his foreign policy initiatives and its domestic policy priorities as a challenge to the secular character of the Turkish state and thus staged what has been called the “post-modern” coup of February 28, 1997, after which Erbakan was indirectly forced to step down. Among other things, this incident demonstrated to the international community the desperate need for democratic reforms and especially the need for the Turkish Army to be kept under political control.

All these developments confirmed the mission of the Turkish military to act as a custodian of the Kemalist legacy and to defend the territorial integrity of the Turkish state against internal and external threats. As was stated above, throughout the 1990s, it was the Turkish armed forces that were guiding TFP through their institutionalized role in the NSC. The influence of the military became evident when, as a response to the WP’s pro-Islamic foreign policy opening, it “drove forward the emerging strategic relationship with Israel;” similarly, the expulsion of Öcalan from Syria can be attributed to the military’s role.¹⁰ Yet, this asymmetry in Turkey’s civil-military relations was another obstacle to the country’s EU bid for membership throughout the decade. Further, the overthrow of Erbakan’s pro-Islamist government and the strategic co-operation with Israel were causing problems to Turkey’s relations with other Muslim countries of the region and especially within the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO), in which Turkey was a member.

International Level

The abovementioned domestic drivers of Turkish politics were not dissociated from external developments given that the end of the Cold War brought about drastic transformations in Turkey’s surrounding environment. The ethnically driven civil war in Yugoslavia and the Caucasus, the first Gulf war as a result of the Iraqi invasion in Kuwait,

the drastic transformation of the European Economic Community with the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the emergence of a new security environment with emphasis on low politics issues were the basic characteristics of this new order. Under such conditions interstate cooperation was becoming imperative. In spite of this, however, the increasing focus of TFP on security concerns, after Özal's death, prevented Turkey from successfully adapting to these realities.

Within this environment, due to internal and external threat perceptions regarding its territorial integrity, Turkey was at odds with most of its neighbours throughout the 1990s, while its relations with the EU further deteriorated. For example, Turkey came very close to an armed confrontation with Greece in 1996, as a result of an ownership controversy over two rocky islands Imia/Kardak, while in 1998, as stated above, a war with Syria was also marginally avoided. The Kurdish issue and its management by the military together with the “post-modern coup” against the WP and the general democratic deficit within Turkey were also creating a lot of obstacles to Turkey's EU membership quest.

All in all the domestic identity crisis and the unstable political scene, along with tectonic geopolitical shifts in the wake of the 1990s, led TFP to dead ends on various fronts; Turkey was dealing with problematic diplomatic relations while being on the brink of economic collapse. More specifically, the realities of the new, post-Cold War security environment, along with political instability, deteriorating economic conditions, the Kurdish issue, the rising Political Islam and the dominance of the military over all aspects of Turkish political life, constituted the main drivers of TFP throughout the 1990s.

TFP drivers in the 2000s

The following decade (2000s), has arguably been one of the most important decades in Turkish history, mainly due to the domestic political and ideological developments. At the same time the external geopolitical environment of Turkey underwent significant shifts which put the country in a difficult position and challenged its national

security. As such, changes at the regional and international system, in conjunction with domestic developments, influenced once again the foreign policy-making of Turkey. Although threat perceptions remained an important driver, the character of the threats evolved according to the new – post 9/11 – geopolitics. As well, the rise of the AKP to power gave new impetus to Turkey, not least because of its management of the economy and its alternative ideological outlook.

Domestic Level

Within the above framework, one of the most significant domestic developments of the 21st century in Turkey was the emergence and election of the AKP to power, in 2002. The AKP was a product of the split of the National Outlook Movement, led by Necmettin Erbakan, and appeared as more moderate and reformist than its Islamist predecessors. The political Islamic roots of the party along with its adoption of a pro-Western and pro-democratic rhetoric not only appealed to the majority of the electoral body but also gave the AKP the right political dynamic so as to enable it to challenge the traditional Kemalist-military establishment, which had been dominating Turkey's political scene since the establishment of the Republic.

The reason why this domestic development has had impact on foreign policy is because it gave rise to a different worldview at the political elite level, not necessarily fundamentally different from the previous one, but different enough so that the AKP's transformation of foreign policy became a subject of debate and discussion. Although this foreign policy orientation was not entirely new, but rather a continuation of Turgut Özal's foreign policy, it has admittedly been more successful mainly because of the success the hybrid ideology of the party enjoyed domestically. This ideological mixture of democratic and conservative values (or rhetoric), partly influenced by a modernized version of Turkish political Islam, has had an impact on the government's domestic and foreign policies alike.

The willingness for a change in foreign policy was clear in the speeches and writings of top AKP officials and leaders such as former

President Abdullah Gül, former Prime Minister and current President Tayyip Erdoğan, and former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Apart from the public expression of their ideas in earlier years, a comprehensive vision for Turkey's foreign policy was put forth by Davutoğlu in his book *Strategic Depth* (Stratejik Derinlik) as early as 2001.¹¹ His ideas have since then been reproduced and developed in other articles and papers of his.¹² Importantly enough, Davutoğlu's, and therefore Turkey's, foreign policy vision was very much informed by a worldview based on Turkish political Islam and the imperial past of the country, which provided a potential geo-cultural and geopolitical sphere of influence for Turkey, though pragmatic interests were not disregarded.

Thus, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as well as the Balkans and Caucasus, seem to have been understood as an Islamic Space with which Turkey could and should have improved relations. On the other hand, according to Davutoğlu, a more cautious and perhaps distant relationship should be sought with Israel; this had a direct appeal to both Turkey's public opinion and the Arab neighbours. Without taking into account regional and international geopolitical developments, this – at least partly – ideologically-driven understanding of TFP by the country's political elites, has undoubtedly played a role in the betterment, for example, of Turkey's relations with its Arab neighbourhood and especially with Syria and Iraq, as well as with non-Arab Iran.

Along with politico-ideological changes within Turkey came economic changes as well. A central notion among scholars is that Turkey's economy has improved as the AKP has proceeded to economic reforms such as fiscal and banking restructuring.¹³ As a consequence there has been an increase in the per capita income and the GDP of the country thus having positive impact on sectors like the health and educational system, while rendering Turkey the 17th largest economy of the planet.¹⁴

Naturally, this economic transformation had repercussions on Turkish foreign economic relations, for Turkey tried to strengthen its economic ties with its neighbours in order to create an export-oriented

economy as well as bring about security and stability through economic interdependence. In addition, over the past two decades in particular, the emergence of “Islamic capital” and related business groups closely associated with the AKP, have influenced the party’s economic outlook and called for closer relations with Turkey’s historic geo-cultural space.¹⁵ Therefore, the rising interest of the AKP government towards the markets of the Arab and Muslim world is certainly a product of both pragmatic and ideological considerations. The end result, at least for the most part of the 2000s, was that Turkey had moved from being a security focused state to a largely trade focused one.¹⁶

Additional domestic factors that have influenced Turkish foreign policy under the AKP include the civil-military relations and the Kurdish Issue – much like in the 90s. Both of them are directly related to the country’s democratization process while the Kurdish issue is also seen as a national security matter intertwined with regional geopolitical dynamics. Admittedly the power struggle between the political power of the AKP and the dominance of the Kemalist military-bureaucratic establishment over the state has been at the epicentre of Turkish domestic politics during the AKP’s governance. The AKP, by incorporating the pro-Western rhetoric of the Kemalists into its own, managed to convincingly pursue an EU membership. In doing so it was supported by the EU in implementing reform packages which aimed, among other things, at restructuring the judiciary and improving the country’s human rights record; the latter also concerned the rights of minorities and, therefore, the Kurds as well.

Thereby, the AKP managed to effectively undermine the dominance of the Kemalist establishment and gradually led the country to a transition into civic governance. This meant that the military could no longer impose its own will on decision-making – at least not to the same extent as before – which, in turn, affected the conduct of foreign policy. That is because the Kemalist foreign policy orientation, apart from its pro-Westernism, it kept a distance from the Arab world, it adopted an approach of non-involvement in regional issues and for the most part supported the maintenance of the *status quo*. From that perspective, as the military’s influence decreased, the AKP had the opportunity to

become more assertive in its foreign policy by engaging its neighbours economically and diplomatically as well as by getting involved in regional bilateral issues as a mediator.

As far as the Kurdish issue is concerned, it is a complex and multileveled matter; moreover, it is a domestic issue as much as it is a foreign and a transnational one. It is precisely for this reason that the question of the rights of the Kurdish minority and the secessionist guerrilla war of the PKK against the government has been influencing Turkish foreign policy-making. On the one hand the AKP government made efforts to address the problem, through peace processes such as the “Kurdish Opening” and the “Imrali Process,” in order to contribute to the democratization of the state, revive its European impetus and prolong its stay to power.¹⁷ On the other hand, however, these efforts also have the goal of minimizing the national security threat that the Kurdish issue poses. For the same reason, Turkey had to rethink its foreign policy towards and approach outside actors which could exacerbate its Kurdish insurgency, such as Northern Iraq, and occasionally cooperate with Iran, Iraq, as well as Syria to contain the PKK. After the 2003 Iraq war, it was the “Arab Spring” and particularly the Syrian conflict that played a central role in revealing once more the regional dimensions of the Kurdish issue, thus forcing Turkey to factor it in its strategic calculations.

International Level

In terms of the impact of the external environment on TFP during this decade, perhaps the most important developments were the Afghanistan and Iraq wars which followed the 9/11 dramatic events, as well as the international economic crisis and the stalemate in Turkey-EU relations.

With particular regard to Iraq, two main consequences of the war had a direct effect on TFP: the strengthening of the Kurdish Regional Government (Iraqi Kurdistan - KRG) and the crippling of Iraq’s relative power in the region. This, in turn, created new challenges for Turkey: on the one hand the KRG became a potential actor of high security risk,

as a safe haven for the PKK amidst increasing attacks in Turkey, while, on the other hand, the central government of Iraq became vulnerable to foreign political influence – primarily from Iran and, to a lesser degree, Saudi Arabia. The power vacuum in Iraq became gradually more obvious and challenging for Turkey as the United States (US) troops started withdrawing between 2007 and 2011.¹⁸

At the same time, a rift had developed between Erbil (Kurdistan) and Baghdad over the management of Kurdistan's natural resources and the KRG's constitutional and political autonomy.¹⁹ In responding to these challenges, Turkey tried to approach both the KRG and Baghdad to ask for their support in dealing with the PKK. Yet, in parallel to that, it was reported that Ankara has been politically supportive of oppositional Sunni political powers in Iraq as a counterbalance to the Shiite Iran-backed government of Baghdad. Eventually, this created a rupture in Turkish-Iraqi relations and a relative decline in Turkey-Iran relations, whereas it caused an improvement in Turkey-KRG relations.

Among these and other regional security problems, such as the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli and Turkish-US relations, Turkey also had to deal with the stalemate in its EU accession process as well as with the political and economic consequences of the global –and particularly the European– economic crisis. Indeed, the diachronically problematic relations with the EU reached a deadlock once again by late 2005, despite Turkey's efforts to meet the EU's Copenhagen criteria. Both the difference of opinion within the EU about Turkey's accession and some shortcomings on Turkey's part played a role.

The AKP's disappointment led it to take a step back from its efforts for EU accession although it never gave up on the prospect of membership. The global economic crisis that broke out approximately two years later had a negative effect on the economy of the EU and Eurozone more specifically. In light of this, Turkey's excellent economic and trade relations with the EU deteriorated – especially after 2007 – whereas its already improved economic relations with the Arab world boomed. From that perspective the lack of motivation to further pursue an EU membership wholeheartedly and the politico-

economic problems of the EU itself played a decisive role in Turkish policy-making.

As far as the 2000s is concerned, it occurs that external developments in conjunction with domestic economic needs and ideological drivers, led the AKP to adopt a less pro-Western and more (Middle) Easternized foreign policy which, especially in the MENA, was supported by its pro-Arab and pro-Islamic rhetoric along with a harsh political stance towards Israel and occasionally the West (US, NATO, EU).

The Impact of the “Arab Spring” and “Islamic State”

The break out of the Arab uprisings in late 2010 has caused significant systemic changes to the Middle East. In this sense, the Turkish regional foreign policy since then has been primarily influenced by geopolitical shifts in its external environment. Due to the “Arab Spring,” not only did the insecurity of the early 2000s (Iraq war) return but also the whole foreign policy doctrine – of “Zero Problems” – seemed to be on the verge of collapse mostly because there was uncertainty about what would follow the transition period in the countries that experienced the revolts. As already noted, it is noteworthy that Turkey has been developing very good trade relations with its Arab neighbours over the last decade. For example, in 2008, its exports to Arab countries reached 25,000 million USD and its imports around 12,000 million USD.²⁰ This was one of the reasons why the overthrow of the traditional authoritarian regimes, along with the hit to economy that these countries took from the uprisings, greatly affected Turkey and its conduct of foreign policy.

A case in point is Turkey’s economic relations with Libya and Syria, to mention only two examples. In the case of Libya, Turkey had big profits from construction projects that Turkish companies undertook while the volume of trade between the two countries amounted to millions of dollars per year.²¹ Moreover, more than 25 thousand Turkish workers were employed in Libya and had to leave the country after the civil war broke out. In terms of the Syrian case, the increasingly positive relations between the two countries at all levels, which peaked

in 2009, included the signing of a free trade and a visa free agreement. The volume of their bilateral trade reached 2.5 billion USD in 2010.²² Within this environment Turkey had to be very cautious while trying to make the best out of a bad and unexpected situation.

In its effort to react to these geopolitical and geo-economic challenges, Turkey resorted to two main tactics: on the one hand it tried to capitalize on its popularity in the region, and promote the “model” of its politico-economic system, in order to develop friendly ties with the newly-elected governments anew – even though Davutoğlu tended to downplay Turkey’s role as a “model”.²³ From that perspective, and given that conservative parties had gained momentum after the uprisings in these countries, Turkey had to also maintain its distance from Israel in order not to disrupt its developing relations with the new Arab governments, thereby hoping that their profitable relations would go back to normal. On the other hand, Turkey had to acknowledge the limits of its “soft power” and its overall foreign policy capabilities, which it had been overplaying by that time thus projecting itself as strengthened and largely autonomous, and to rely (bandwagon) once again on its traditional western allies in order to counter instability and threats that stemmed from the new regional order and specifically the Syrian crisis.²⁴

In the almost three years that followed the breakout of the Arab uprisings, the external changes have affected Turkey’s domestic politics while domestic developments have also played a role in shaping the country’s foreign policy. Starting from the former, the exacerbation of the Kurdish question in particular, as a result of the Syrian crisis, gave rise to the need for decisive steps towards its resolution. In parallel, the resolution of the Kurdish question was also imperative for the success of the AKP’s new constitutional reforms, and its re-election in the 2014/15 local, presidential and national elections. What is more, any positive steps towards resolving this decades-old problem, as well as other constitutional issues, would also favour Turkey’s prospect for an EU membership.

With regard to the relation between domestic developments and foreign policy, the recent events of the “Gezi Park,” in the summer

of 2013,²⁵ had some effect, although its real extent remains to be seen. Domestically, the intensity and relative massiveness of the anti-government demonstrations, together with the often harsh response from the state through the crackdown of the police, challenged the AKP's hegemony and legitimacy as well as revealed its limits. This, in turn, had a negative impact on Turkey's otherwise pro-democracy regional and international image. In other words, it has, arguably, delegitimized – to some degree – the “Turkish model” and Turkey's ability to support oppressed peoples of the region, while at the same time it worsened its image before the EU. This dynamic manifested again in the 07 June 2015 national elections, when the AKP got 40.8 percent of the votes; an approximate 9 percent drop from the 2011 results.

Although much depend on domestic and external on-going developments, it would be permissible to say that the Arab uprisings have forced Ankara to recalibrate its foreign policy and adopt new tactics in order to adapt to the new and challenging geopolitical order. More importantly, they revealed the fragility and overplayed ambitions of Turkey's “new” foreign policy – under the AKP – and the “zero problems with neighbours” principle, which came to dominate Ankara's discourse.

Likewise, the rise of the self-styled “Islamic State,” as a product of both the Iraq war and the Arab uprisings especially in Syria, re-emphasized Turkey's insecurities and threat perceptions as well as its ambiguous role in the region that stems from Ankara's need to deal with multiple and complex foreign policy fronts. The Kurdish issue had once more a central role to these developments, particularly amidst the battle for Kobani – a Kurdish town on the Turkish-Syrian border – where the “Islamic State” was eventually defeated by a coalition of (Syrian and Iraqi) Kurds and secular Arab forces. Turkey's indecisiveness and unwillingness to both actively join the international “Coalition of the Willing”²⁶ and help the Kurds in Kobani, prompted Kurdish protests in Turkey and had a negative impact on the Kurdish peace process and the AKP's image among Turkey's Kurds. This was reflected in the 13 percent that the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) received

at the June 2015 national elections; a historic victory for Turkey's Kurdish movement that surpassed the 10 percent threshold and entered the parliament as a political party for the first time.²⁷

The emergence of various reports claiming Turkey has been collaborating with Islamist movements in Syria made things worse in terms of both the international image of the country and the AKP's domestic legitimacy, while Ankara's post-"Arab Spring" pro-Western shift was once again reversed.²⁸ Thus, regional instability has also had domestic repercussions which, coupled with the authoritarian turn of the AKP and President Erdoğan, induced social, economic and political turmoil and affected negatively the AKP's (electoral) popularity. The new period that Turkey entered after the June 2015 elections is sooner or later expected to resemble past decades such as the 1970s and 1990s: with early elections, numerous short-lived governments and paradoxical coalitions. As this transition is under way, Turkey's domestic contradictions will lead to difficult foreign policy-making and render Ankara unable to successfully respond to exogenous geopolitical pressures and constraints. At this juncture Turkey will continue to be concerned more with security rather than economic issues and, given the systemic shifts that the Middle East is undergoing, its external environment will be playing a central role in its foreign policy calculations.

Conclusions

Through this brief evaluation of the drivers of Turkish regional policy since 1990 two initial observations can be made. First, both the domestic and external level plays a role in shaping Turkey's foreign policy. Second, the negative influence of multiple variables together with the lack of a concrete and effective foreign policy strategy during the 1990s could explain much of the rising need for a foreign policy doctrine such as Ahmet Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth." Similarly, the shifting geopolitical realities of the new millennium made the implementation of that doctrine even more necessary and possible as well as largely successful. Yet the new regional landscape which came

about after the Arab uprisings led Turkey to a more traditional foreign policy which, indeed, diverged from the AKP's approach up to that point. Yet the rise of the "Islamic State" brought back the same doubts among Western states as to whether Turkey is a committed ally or a rising regional power with independent and revisionist aspirations.

From the perspective of these two observations and recent changes in TFP, it can be argued that the external environment, and everything that comes with it in terms of geopolitics, diplomacy, economics, external threat perceptions, etc., has been the most important driver of TFP since 1990. Within this framework, the end of the Cold War, the 9/11 events and the Afghanistan/Iraq wars that followed, as well as the Arab uprisings and the "Islamic State," have been the most important – external, systemic – turning points. Yet, such factors cannot, by themselves, shape the whole of TFP. For example, the role of the dominant ideology at the political elite level also played a significant role since the rise of political Islam, and its clash with the traditional Kemalist establishment, led to the creation of the AKP which would later filter external developments in its own way, thus shaping the outcomes of Turkey's foreign policy. Likewise, the need for economic recovery and development, as well as domestic democratization problems (e.g. Kurdish issue, human rights, etc.), played their own part in the configuration of TFP, especially when it came to the ups and downs of Turkey's relations with the EU.

Today, TFP is once again before the need of striking a balance between its internal and external dynamics; even more so after the most recent increasing domestic polarization at the social and political level. While external developments are, more often than not, hard to control, domestic politics and developments lie at large in the hands of the governments. Therefore, the key for Turkey's security, stability, progress and foreign policy success, relies greatly on the decisive resolution of domestic problems, so as for the country to be able to effectively evaluate external challenges without concerns for domestic repercussions that could in turn become unstable variables and impact the successful conduct of foreign policy. Such an approach would also assist Turkey in dealing with its ever salient identity crisis, recalibrating

its international outlook and successfully finding its place in the global arena.

NOTES

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