

Turkey under AKP: Foreign Policy towards the Middle East

Author

Muhammad Ismail*

Abstract

This paper focuses on the important transformation that took place in Turkish foreign policy during the era of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Turkey maintained a non-aligned and non-intervention foreign policy in most of the republican era. The activism in the regional and global affairs started with the indulgence and rise of Islamic political parties in the Turkish political system. Initially, these political parties were far from gaining affirmative control over the domestic, regional, and global affairs but their influence arose with the emergence of AKP in Turkey. AKP persuaded the traditional “Pro-Western” foreign policy during the early days of its government but abandoned its pursuit by acclaiming that West is not serious in including Turkey in its bloc. It then looked towards the other alternatives by establishing close ties with the Middle Eastern neighbours. This paper analyses the transformation of Turkish foreign policy and the reasons and factors that brought this change.

Keywords: Kemalism, Arab Spring, Gezi Park, Ottoman identity Islamism, Copenhagen Criteria, Cold War, Islamism, non-aligned.

* MPhil Scholar and Researcher.

Introduction

Turkey has a troubled history both at domestic and international levels. Economic crises, political uncertainties, the emergence of several threats and challenges are some of the most important reasons which kept Turkey in complete uncertainty regarding its future vis-à-vis external policies. These challenges further posed severe threats to the Turkish domestic, external, and security policies due to an increase in the number of factors at the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, the assessment and study of the Turkish role in international affairs become more complicated and multifaceted (F. Stephen Larrabee, 2003) Turkey achieved notable results in its foreign policy since the AKP came into power in 2002 (Giannotta, 2012). Turkey is bestowed with a unique geographical and geopolitical position which also helped in reevaluating and reshaping its foreign policy.

The study of Turkish foreign policy before the AKP revealed that it was inclined towards the West and its foreign policy was rest upon the idea of the secularization of the country. Moreover, security imperative during most of the Cold War era bound Turkey to make its foreign policy following the security environment of the region (Dalay, 2016). However, the post-Cold War period led Turkey to rethink its foreign policy. In the earlier years of its power, AKP brought a shift in the country's foreign policy. This shift or change in the foreign policy was based on the new understanding of regional politics and the security environment. Interdependence and minimization of mistrusts among the neighbors were at the core of the new foreign policy (Dalay, 2016).

Ahmet Davutoglu, a professor of International Relations and advisor to the Prime Minister on foreign affairs in the first term of AKP, is considered the architect of new Turkish foreign policy. He presented the concept of 'zero problems with neighbours'. This concept, initially, was introduced by keeping the economic objectives in front but it was also hoped that the same may be converted for the political objectives in the future (Dalay, 2016).

AKP emerged as a strong political party and Turkey appeared as a strong state with the credentials to play an active and determinative role during the Arab Spring. Turkey preferred to play an active and affirmative role in the Arab's upheavals instead of remaining inactive and handicapped. It was the result of Turkish proactive policies that Turkey showed its support for the democratic uprising in Tunisia and Egypt. The Turkish support for democracy can be seen in the case of Egypt when the Turkish prime minister has shown sympathy for Muslim brotherhood by leading an anti-Mubarak protest (Demirag, 2014). On the other hand, when the waves of Arab Spring knocked Syria, another layer of transformation was observed in Turkish foreign policy. Turkish foreign policy which was strict to the non-militarization of the region changed into the military interventions for solutions to the problems. The military intervention was the result of the killing of Turkish citizens in the war between the Assad forces and the Syrian revolutionary forces. Turkey requested NATO for the military intervention in the Syrian crisis and asked for the provision of Patriot missiles as defence against the Syrian forces.

Iran strongly reacted towards the counter measures of the Turkish republic by stating these steps as aggression and steps towards the deterioration of regional peace and stability. Iran's Chief of staff condemned Turkey and said that the operationalization of Patriot missiles will trigger the

chances of third world war (Demirag, 2014). Syrian crisis also strained the relations between Russia and Turkey. The relations between Russia and Turkey became tense when the Turkish military shot down a Russian fighter jet over the violation of its territory in November 2015. The pilot of the jet lost his life in this incident. Russian government expressed great concern over this incident and broke its diplomatic and bilateral ties with Turkey. Later, Turkey, after realizing the intensity of the issue, shared condolences with Russia. It happened through a letter that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wrote to his counterpart, Vladimir Putin. The relations, afterward, restored between the two countries as the act of Turkish president deescalated the tense environment (Yesiltas, 2013).

Davutoglu has an important status in the formation of Turkish foreign policy; he remained the advisor of Turkish prime minister on the external affairs in 2003, acted as foreign minister of Turkish Republic in 2009, and remained the prime minister of Turkey from 2014 to 2016. He performed an active role in the formation and transformation of Turkish foreign policy. His era is regarded as both success and failure because he, at one point, worked for the end of Turkish isolationism from the regional politics by maintaining that Turkey should play an active role in the regional affairs by keeping Ottoman legacy before and, on the other hand, a decline had also been seen in the Turkish standing in the global level during the Davutoglu era (Nafi, 2016).

Many observers marked Davutoglu's era in the Turkish foreign policy as a period of missed opportunities because the policies laid down by Davutoglu was aimed to make Turkey as a strong actor in the regional affairs but Turkey's internal political atmosphere started towards destabilizing as a result of these policies (Dalay, 2016). Binali Yildirim became the next Prime Minister of Turkey after Davutoglu and announced during his first address to the parliament that the focus of his government will be on the minimization of the enemies and increase in the friends (Dalay, 2016).

The following questions will be addressed while discussing the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East. It is, however, pertinent to mention here that the Turkish economy had boosted during the AKP era by the transformed foreign policy. Interdependence, soft power, and mutual interest among the neighboring countries are also some indicators of Turkish economic developments. Besides above, Turkey still needs to implement its transformed foreign policy in the regional and global environment. The following questions are, thus, to be part of this study:

1. What are the historical trends in Turkish foreign policy?
2. What are the major changes in Turkish Foreign Policy during the AKP period?
3. What caused these changes?

Historical Background of Turkish Foreign Policy

Turkish foreign policy constantly transformed during different periods. Turkey, after the abolition of the Ottoman Empire, maintained a distance from the Muslim world and persuaded West for the sake of protection of its sovereignty and the economic, social and political development. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, transforms Turkish foreign policy for the first time. His era is recalled as the Kemalist era of Turkish Foreign Policy which prevailed from 1923 to

1949. The second phase of Turkish foreign policy started in 1950 with the emergence of the Cold War between the then superpowers and the winner of WWII. Western countries wanted Turkey to be on their side to contain communism to prevail. The third phase of Turkish foreign policy started with the end Cold War and the bipolar struggle between the US and USSR. This period is, significantly, considered an important phase of Turkish foreign policy in which Turkey again started to shape its relations with the neighbouring countries and the Muslim world. This era lasted until the 9/11 attack and with an end to the unipolarity of the United States. However, the transformation of Turkish foreign policy during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) will be focused to be explained here.

Turkish Foreign Policy During the AKP Era (2002-2018)

The AKP after becoming in power in 2002 brought various changes in its foreign policy. Until now, The AKP has enjoyed five consecutive periods in power. The AKP formed its government for the first time in 2002 and remained in power since 2007. The AKP established its government for the second time in 2007 which ended in 2011. The reforms introduced and implemented by the AKP in its previous tenures made him enough popular to win the elections for the third time. In 2011, AKP again come into power and governed Turkey till 2015. The AKP took the office for the fourth time in 2015 and remain in power till the announcements of the next elections in 2018. And remained in power till date after winning the 2018 election.

The analysis of the first two periods of the Turkish foreign policy under the reign of AKP shows that Turkey entirely changed its foreign policy from Western orientation to the enhancement of good relations with the neighbours. Europeanization and the sustainability of democracy were at the core of the Turkish foreign policy objective in the first term of the AKP government. Moreover, AKP was further committed to struggle for the durable and long-term relations with the European Union (Zhinioglu, 2015). The objective of Turkish foreign policy i.e. membership of the European Union, laid down the foundations to introduce multi-faceted foreign policy (Yilmaz, 2009). A short history of Turkish foreign policy during the different phases of the AKP government is as below.

Turkish Foreign Policy during the First Term of AKP (2002-2007)

AKP, being holding an Islamic character, had to face the challenge of secularized society in its first term of power which started in 2002. It was because the elders of AKP formed a coalition government in the 1990s in which they advocated for the creation and the importance of Muslim 5-8. Turkish quest for the membership of the EU was regarded as slavery of the West. It was rather emphasized that Turkey would lose the true essence of its identity if it joined the EU (Bozdoglioglu, 2008).

Therefore, the foremost challenge for the AKP leadership was to gain the trust of the people of the state by proving AKP as a reformed party. AKP, however, adopted the opposite policies towards the formation of foreign policy which were totally in contradiction to its ancestors and proclaimed “the Copenhagen Criteria the Ankara Criteria” (Idiz, 2012). To attain the membership in EU, AKP brought multiple reforms in its foreign policy. These reforms were implemented in Turkish politics at a speed that was never experienced in any era of Turkish political history.

Two significant developments were observed with the implementation of these reforms in Turkish politics. First, AKP departed itself from the policies of its Islamists predecessors, and secondly, Turkey successfully drives its foreign policy towards the West following the concepts of secular values. These reforms put Turkey in the way of the “ideological moderation process” by emphasizing the importance of democratic society and integration into the European Union (Schwedler, 2011).

The policies carried by AKP in its first tenure of government built trust in the public as it was believed that the democratic order and drift towards the membership of the EU will strengthen the economic and structural values in Turkey (Cem Baslevent, 2009). To have fruitful outcomes of the new reforms Turkey appointed Ali Babacan as the Minister of Economy and the Chief of Negotiator for the EU membership. Abdullah Gul, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, when asked about the appointment of Babacan at two different positions replied that his appointment is beneficial as the global financial affairs and Turkish-EU relations are going parallel to each other. (Milliyet, May 24, 2005)

Turkish Foreign Policy in the Second Term of AKP Government (2007-2011)

AKP emerged as the largest party as a result of the 2007 elections and was in a position to govern Turkey without any coalition. However, it has to face challenges on the foreign policy issues as its efforts for the annexation of Turkey with the EU were slowing down. The then foreign minister of Turkey presented a new methodology for the Turkish foreign policy which was based on the idea of activism and political stability (Cagapaty, 2007). Turkey moved away from its traditional foreign policy and laid new foundations for the reorientation of Turkish foreign policy by enchanting the idea of “zero problems with the neighbors” (Davutoglu, 2010).

Turkey was perceived to play a central role in regional and global affairs according to this new concept. Precisely, Turkey was supposed to be in good relations with its Western partners on the one hand, and on the other hand, efforts were made to maintain brotherly relations with the Middle Eastern neighbors and the Caucasian region. “Identity” also played an important role in the formation of Turkish foreign policy in the second tenure of AKP as it was emphasized that Turkey is the only country of the Muslim world where the democracy is present with its true spirit which allows Turkey to play an active role in the regional and global affairs. Furthermore, active engagements in its neighbourhood allowed Turkey to move away from the traditional parameters of defensive and passive foreign policy.

Turkey, by enchanting the concept of “leadership” role in the regional affairs, wants to become a representative of the weak states of the region both at the domestic and global levels. Such an example can be seen in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The relations between Turkey and Israel came to the brink when in 2009 Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened Israel to be intervened in one minute (New York Times, January 29, 2009). A common perception of the Turkish citizens about the Turkish foreign policy was as the Turkish leadership is unable to play an independent role under the influence of Western powers. By advocating the Palestinian issue Turkey engineers an independent foreign policy by turning away from the dependencies created by the international powers.

Moreover, the new shift in Turkish foreign policy during the second term of AKP allowed Turkey to raise the voice for the rights of the majority states of the region. Turkish stance on the Palestinian issue brought two unprecedented changes at domestic and global levels. Conservatives leadership, which was kept at a distance by the former secular elites, was given the right to participate in the political affairs of Turkey at domestic level and, Turkey by advocating and supporting the Palestinian in Palestine issue gave a message to the global community that Turkey would raise the voice for the oppressed majority of the region (Onis, 2015).

Turkish Foreign Policy in the Third Term of AKP (2011-2015)

AKP formed the government in Turkey as a result of the July 2011 elections in which the party got 326 out of 550 seats of the Turkish parliament. Moreover, the AKP secured 49.9 percent of the total votes cast in the Turkish general elections that made it the strongest party of the parliament (Hoffmann, 2012). Identity remained the dominant factor of Turkish foreign policy in the third term of government. AKP revived the importance of Turkish traditions, emphasized the importance of religious values, Ottoman history, and geography in foreign policy. By advocating these factors Turkey wanted to become the central player in regional affairs (Zachariades, 2018). As mentioned earlier, Turkey wanted to become the leader of the oppressed which is also visible in the victory speech of the Erdogan after the elections of 2011. Erdogan said in the victory speech that the victory of his party is the victory of the “oppressed”. He further stated that the achievement of his party is “much of a victory for Istanbul as it is in Sarajevo, as much of a victory for Izmir as it is for Beirut, as much of a victory for Diyarbakir as it is for the West Bank and Gaza” and further argued that it is not only Turkey who won the election of 2011 but the Middle Eastern, Caucasian, and the Balkan regions are also the winner of these elections (Seibert, 2011). In 2012, Turkey came in the support of protestors during the Arab Spring by representing itself as a model for the regional countries. According to Ahmet Davutoglu, “when you compared them years ago with Turkey today, you could see the change of democratic spirit and institutionalization” (Dal, 2012).

By introducing identity in its foreign policy Turkey intended to give a message to the protestors that AKP is looking to work for a common community based on the culture, values, and traditions and AKP aims to establish relations with the regional countries based on emotions instead of building relations on political and strategically grounds. Such an example can be seen during the rallies of municipal elections in Turkey in 2014 when Turkey supported the Mohamed Morsi, the President of Egypt, who was overthrown by the military establishment and presented a symbolism between the AKP and Muslim Brotherhood.

Turkish Foreign Policy in the Fourth Term of AKP (2015-2018)

The fourth term of AKP was started in 2015 and faced severe threats to its political dominance. The general elections held in June 2015 were dreadful for the AKP as it lost its majority in the parliament. However, the general elections held in November 2015 enabled AKP to maintain its majority in the parliament. AKP posed threats to the dominance of the military which can be seen in the shape of a coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016. Beside above some external factors also

brought threats to the AKP and Turkey. The external threats were the result of the developments occurring in the neighbourhood of Turkey. These threats, according to Numan Kurtulmus, The Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, were the result of Turkish foreign policy towards Syria (Hurriyet, August 19, 2016).

AKP carried the efforts for the public opinion regarding the foreign policy in its fourth term by realizing the sensitivity of the issues. In doing so, AKP again turned away from the identity based foreign policy and started to base its foreign policy instead of the national interests. A nationalist foreign policy was the need of the time that was aimed to unite the nation against the emerging external threats. The AKP was uniting the nation against the eminent external threats on the one hand and on the other hand, it was complaining the international community as Turkey was left alone its friends in front of the emerging threats and, that too, after the failure of the military coup in Turkey.

Turkey was specifically complaining to the United States and the European Union who were not supporting Turkey during crucial times. Turkey perceived that the attitude of its allies during the time of need was awful as they were not ready to see democracy to be flourished and prevailed in Turkey. One of the reasons brought up by the media houses which describe the negative role of the US regarding the non-prevalent of democracy was the incident took place during the 1980 military coup in Turkey in which US President Carter praised the military establishment in these words that “our boys have done it”. In August 2016 while announcing Turkey’s military involvement in Syria, Erdogan stated that “you cannot divide our nation, you cannot lower our flag, you cannot smash up our homeland, our state, you cannot silence our call to prayers, you cannot bring this country to your knees, you cannot bring to heel these people” (Kesgin, 2016).

Transformation in Turkish Foreign Policy during The AKP Era

The Justice and Development Party was formed by a group of Islamic activists in 2001. It was aimed by the founders of the party to modernize the party in accordance with the Islamic and liberal values to attract many people towards it. It can further be understood that the Islamic thoughts as represented by the National View Movement were replaced with democratic norms. The AKP as a result of these changes appeared as the strongest party which was, at the same time, acceptable to all walks of people (Oktem, 2011). Moreover, the AKP succeeded in making a connection between Islamism, democracy and nationalism by having these reforms in the party (Bilici, 2006). Justice and Development Party have been in power in Turkey since 2002.

The study of Turkish foreign policy shows that AKP persuaded a westward policy during the first three years of its power and later, Middle East became of the focus of Turkish foreign policy as the hopes for Turkey's accession in the European Union were shattered. The second term of AKP began in 2007 and lasted in 2011, during this period Turkey started to play an influential and active role in the Middle East while keeping its Ottoman identity before. Turkey triggered the way for the economic integration between the regional countries from 2002-2010. AKP used the identity discourse, historical and geographical legacies, and framed its foreign policy to deal with the Middle Eastern neighbors during the third term of its government from 2011 to 2015. Another

shift took place in the Turkish foreign policy from 2015 to 2018 as a result of the Kurdish issue where the Turkish government under the banner of AKP enchanted the need for nationalism for the survival of its territorial integrity. The study shows that AKP before coming into power promised for the moderated reforms in political and economic sectors which appealed to the business sectors, the poor, and were acceptable to the Kurds as well (Mandaville,2014). In the following lines, an overview of the important transformation in Turkish foreign policy during the AKP era will be analyzed.

A Shift from Kemalist Isolationism to Neo-Ottoman Engagement

The AKP tried to maintain friendly relations with Turkish neighbouring countries in the first decade of its government. The government policies during that time revolved around the concept of peaceful and harmonious relations with the neighbouring countries by maintaining the policy of zero problems with them. The government also carried the efforts for the development of cultural and historical relations with all those states which were once considered to be a part of the Ottoman Empire.

The AKP, as discussed earlier, promised for the economic development of the country's poor people and wanted to attract the business community of the country by introducing the concept of liberal economy, therefore, it maintained good relations with the authoritative regimes of the Middle Eastern States. The idea behind the maintenance of friendly relations with these states was to improve and increase the trade with these states which was important for the Turkish economy. Turkey, during the reign of AKP, struggled for the achievement of the role of central states by having active participation in the regional affairs. Such an instance can be seen in the face of the Palestinian conflict in which Turkey offered to be given the role of mediator between Israel and Palestine (Barkey, 2011). This change in the foreign policy is recalled as a shift from the “Kemalist isolationism” to “Neo-Ottoman Engagement” in the Middle East” (Kandil, 2016).

Turkish Foreign Policy during the Arab Spring 2011

In 2011, another shift came in the Turkish foreign policy as a result of the Arab Spring. Turkey went into economic relations with the Arab monarchs before the Arab Spring hit the Middle East that forced Turkey to reshape its foreign policy following the new wave. It is pertinent to mention that Turkey was in a close connection, on the ideological grounds, with the Muslim Brotherhood, therefore, Turkey sided the revolutionaries at that time. The idea behind the support of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was to convince the governments about the reshaping of Islamic values in accordance with the moderate of democratic values.

Another objective that Turkey intended to gain at that moment to prove itself an influential actor at a regional level and to acquire the regional balance of power in its favor (Kandil, 2016). Such an example can be seen when Muhammad Morsi, the President of Egypt, and Khaled Mashal of Hamas participated in the AKP party meeting in 2012. The participation of these leaders in the meeting represented a sign of mutual understanding and cooperation among the AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood. The relations between AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood triggered the

waves of revolution in some other parts of the Middle East (Aydin, 2014). It is, however, important to note that Turkey extended its support for revolutionary groups in the Middle East after the Arab Spring, Egypt, Tunisia and Syria are few among those states who were benefitted by Turkey after the Arab Spring (Lynch, 2016).

Turkey assessed that the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia as evidence of its foreign policy approach towards the Middle Eastern neighbours. Keeping in view the uprising of Egypt and Tunisia before Turkey started to support the anti-Assad forces in Syria in order to fulfill its unaccomplished desires against Syria (Tezcur, 2016). Unluckily, all that Turkey planned towards the Middle Eastern neighbours diminished as the Tunisian movement which was raised against the government ended in a compromise between the rebellion and government. The Morsi's rule in Egypt come to an end as a result of coup d'état, and finally, Basharul Assad remained successful in securing its government in Syria with the help of Iran. Besides the above failures, however, Turkey developed its relations with Qatar, who was also a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2017 (Lynch, op.cit). The developments during the Arab Spring shows that Turkey failed to implement its policies of zero problems and friendly relations with the neighbouring countries.

Turkish foreign policy struck in the hands of sectarian and ideological limitations during the Arab Spring, as a result, various domestic challenges appeared for the AKP. These challenges appeared as a result of emerging differences with the Gulenists movement in 2012, protest against the government in 2013 at Gezi Park, an effort carried by the Turk military against Erdogan in 2016 and the constitutional reforms as a result of the presidential referendum conducted in 2017. The domestic developments led AKP to revisits the foreign policy towards nationalism to keep itself in power. The new policies forced the AKP to start anti-Kurd foreign policy after 2015. The external elements are one of the most important reasons which compel the government to carry out anti-Kurd policies because the Kurd inhabitants in Syria were becoming the US ally in the Syrian civil war which, Turkey, seemed like a threat for its territorial integrity (Tanrisever, 2018). Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East can be summarized as an attempt to become an influential regional actor by playing an assertive role in regional affairs. It strengthened its relations with the neighboring countries through the promotion of trade and cooperation till 2010 until the breakout of the Arab Spring in 2011. The emergence of the Arab Spring led Turkey in the support of Sunni dominated parties in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, and by extending its support in favor of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt during the years 2011 to 2015. However, Turkey failed to achieve its desired objective from the Arab Spring and again revisited its foreign policy by adopting a more securitized and defensive foreign policy against the Kurds. The Turkish policymaker started to divert the foreign policy towards Russia and China with the end of the Arab Spring (Tanrisever, op. cit).

Turkish Foreign Policy in Post Arab Spring

Political demands were the important reason that triggered the Arab uprisings in the Middle East as the people demanding political freedom from the authoritative regimes of the region. Turkey, in this situation, was the only democratic state in the region. Although, Turkish political history shows that the democratic process was derailed at several occasions but still it had a history with a functional parliamentary democratic system of the region. In this context, Turkey intended to support the Arab people to attain democratic goals. Religion played an important role in Turkey's inclination towards the protestors of the Arab springs because it was assumed that mutual cooperation and harmony among the regional states can easily be achieved with the common identities and political interests. Turkey, adopting a regional view of the events, backed the happenings of Arab spring in two ways i.e. a new regional and democratic order in the region where Turkey would have to play a leading role (Yuksel, 2018).

There are, at least, four important developments of the Arab Spring which forced Turkey to reprioritize its foreign policy towards the Middle East. Syrian crises are on the top of these developments which turned into violent conflict and paved the way for civil war in Syria in 2012-2013. The second important development of the Arab spring was the removal of Morsi from the office of the President in Egypt by the military. These two incidents were thought to be an obstacle to the change in the Arab world. The third important development was the emergence of the Islamic State during 2013-14.

The international community, in response to the rise of ISIS, revised their policies towards the Middle East by giving preferences to the security of the region instead of favoring the democratic transformations. Turkey under these circumstances had to face two different fronts at the regional and global levels. At the regional level Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iran propagate the rise of ISIS which further intensified the sectarian divide in the region. At the global level, liberal secularists in the West stood against the democratic transformation in the Middle East, as a result, the supporters of Arab uprisings did not get the support from the West. Supporters of Arab spring in general and Syrian opposition forces, in particular, suffered a lot after the West kept itself out of the prevailed situation in the region (Yuksel, op. cit).

The last, perhaps, most drastic development of the Arab spring was the Kurdish movements. Kurds living in Iraq and Syria had started to expand their territory with the support of ISIS and with the financial and military assistance of the international community. In 2014, ISIS with the help of the United States and Iraqi Kurdish militia occupied Kobani, a Syrian town inhabited by Kurds. However, YPG after its victory proved to be legitimized and capable of fighting force to fight against ISIS. It is pertinent to mention that the occupation of Kobane provoked nationalist sentiments among the Kurds of the region.

These sentiments were further aimed towards the creation of an independent Kurdish entity. Keeping before these developments in the region, the PKK becomes an influential bargaining force for Turkey. PKK, by taking advantage of its position against Turkey and with the breakdown of the peace deal with Turkey, started warfare against Turkey in 2015. The aggressive postures

carried by the PKK compel Turkey to reframe its foreign policy by giving importance to the national security over the political initiatives.

This further led Turkey to reshape its foreign policy towards the Middle East in accordance with the new circumstances. ISIS extended its activities within the territories of Turkey by launching attacks on the Kurdish and leftist groups residing in Turkey and carried out a series of attacks in Suruc, Diyarbakir, and Ankara. Another series of suicide attack were conducted in the Sultanahmet area, Istiklal Street, and Ataturk airport by hitting the soft targets like tourists and foreigners. The latter series of attacks are presumed as a reaction from the ISIS against the joining of Turkey's global anti-ISIS coalition. These attacks intensified Turkish domestic security and posed further ramifications for Turkey's policies towards regional affairs.

Pragmatic Approach

Several internal factors like losing majority in the parliament, coup d'état, and the rise of the Gulenist movement led AKP to go for a pragmatic approach towards Syria in 2016. The application of this approach was to step back from the demand of the regime change in Syria and to intriguer fight against the ISIS and Kurds. Turkey further signaled to go into cooperation with Russia and Syria to find an appropriate solution to the crises. Turkish move from interference to cooperation developed its relations with the major regional players e.g. Russia, Iran, and Israel on the one hand but on the other hand, its relations with the EU and the West come to the brink.

The cooperation with the earlier players was meant to reduce the tensions and to find a solution to terrorism. Turkey started an all-out operation against the ISIS and Kurds with the earlier consent of Russia and Iran in 2016 as the policy of regime change was no more at the top of the Turkish foreign policy agenda. Although, Turkey has tried to develop relations with Syria but Syria still dubious about Turkey as it might carry the policy of Assad's removal after some time.

Conclusion

The study of Turkish foreign policy during the AKP era revealed that Turkey had followed different foreign policy pattern from 2002 to 2018. AKP took his flight by pursuing the West in 2002 to have the membership of the European Union, however, the efforts to pursue the West was abandoned as the European Community refused to grant the membership of the European Union to Turkey. Turkey, as a result of the failure of the attainment of European Union membership, started to transform its foreign policy by looking for other alternatives. The first kind of such transformations can be seen through the initiation of friendly and mutual relations between Turkey and its neighbours.

Ahmet Davutoglu, an academician turned politician, crafted the new Turkish foreign policy. The new concepts of Turkish foreign policy were presented in Davutoglu's famous 'Strategic Depth Doctrine'. 'Strategic Depth'; theorizes the Turkish foreign policy and laid the foundations of a transformed Turkish foreign policy. Following Strategic Depth Turkey could transform its foreign policy instead of the one traditionally followed by Turkey. Furthermore, Davutoglu presented and introduced the ideas of "Multitrack Diplomacy" and "Multidimensional Foreign Policy" and emphasized upon the importance and maintenance of good relations between Turkey and its

neighbours. Turkey successfully followed such a foreign policy until the rise of the Arab Spring in 2011.

Another important transformation can be seen during and in the post Arab Spring. Turkey showed its commitments to the revolutionaries during the Arab Spring who were annoyed by their governments and protesting about it. Turkey appeared and stood in their support by advocating the democratic transition in the countries affected by the waves of Arab Uprising. Such an example can be seen in the case of Egypt where the democratically elected government of Dr. Morsi was overthrown by the military dictator. The relations between Turkey and Syria also fell prey to the Arab Spring because the earlier was in support of the protestors who were demanding regime change in Syria while the latter had accused and criticized Turkey for providing undue favor and support to the anti-regime forces. The unstable relations between the two countries also brought Russia and Iran in the center who stood side by side with the Syrian government to respond to any possible Turkish aggression.

AKP, with an Islamic background, earned a great reputation in the Muslim World in general and within the Arab countries in particular until the rise of the Arab Spring in 2011. Turkey's relations with the Arab States suffered in the post Arab Spring era. Political developments in Egypt enforced Turkey to enchant the importance of democracy which was not acceptable for many of the strong Arab states. These Arab states, except Qatar, were agreed and determent to work with a military government in Egypt instead of the democratically elected government of Dr. Morsi. Turkey favored the Morsi's government and lead a huge public procession in his support but could not alter the situation hence failed to accomplish its desire.

Turkey had carried different foreign policy options during the AKP era but, unfortunately, it had both successes and failures in its credentials. Turkey: where new friends were made it also lost the previous ones or at least the earlier allies of Turkey kept themselves on a distance from Turkey. Their action was the result of the underpinning fear of suffering of their interests if they join Turkey in its journey. Turkey had failed to balance its internal and external policies while applying different foreign policy options. This imbalance was the result of the uncalculated diplomatic, strategic and political management.

The former allies of Turkey were not taken into confidence while persuading the new allies. This was drastic for Turkey, as moving away from the previous partners put Turkey on a difficult diplomatic and political path. Thus, the study shows that Turkey needs to keep a balance between its internal and external policies as the external policies have both a direct and indirect effect on the internal ones. There is a need to have equilibrium between the old and new friends. Finally, it is needed to have such foreign policy initiatives in which the states' interests can be preserved or can be safeguarded easily.

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