

## Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East During the Rule of the Justice and Development Party: Interaction of Interests and Future Challenges

*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi İktidarı Döneminde Ortadoğu'da Türk Dış Politikası: Çıkar Etkileşimi ve Gelecekteki Zorluklar*

**Hüsamettin İNAÇ**

*Prof. Dr., Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi,  
FEAS, Political Science and International Relations Department,  
husamettininac@yahoo.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6922-2010>*

Makale Başvuru Tarihi: 14.08.2022

Makale Kabul Tarihi: 24.08.2022

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

**Aymene HADJI**

*Expert of Science, Kütahya Dumlupınar University,  
The Institute of Postgraduate Education, History Department,  
aymene.hadji@ogr.dpu.edu.tr  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3564-7077>*

### ÖZET

Yirmi birinci yüzyılın başında Türk dış politikası bir önceki yüzyıla nazaran çok büyük bir değişim ve dönüşüme maruz kalmıştır. Zira içinde yaşadığımız yüzyılda Türkiye'nin önüne Balkanlardan başlayarak Kafkasya'ya oradan Orta Asya ve Ortadoğu'ya kadar uzanan yeni bir jeopolitik ufuk ve farklı bir pencere açılmıştır. Bu yeni durum yeni siyasi yaklaşımların ortaya çıkmasına yol açmış ve Türkiye hem iç ve hem de dış siyasetini yeniden şekillendirecek bir formülasyonu esas almıştır. Bu formülasyon özünde çok etnikli, çok dinli ve çok hukuklu Osmanlı'nın çokkültürlü yapısından ilham alarak İslam ve Osmanlı mirasıyla bütünleşerek farklı kültürlerin farklılıklarını yitirmeden bir arada, yan yana ve iç içe yaşayabileceği bir pratiğe oturtulmuştur. Haddi zatında bu bakış açısı yerel ve bölgesel aktörlerle ilişkilerini normalleştirerek denge tesis ettiği ve soğuk savaş dönemindeki AB ve ABD'ye bağımlı bir politikadan uzaklaşmayı gerektirmektedir. Nitekim 2002 sonu itibarıyla iktidarı devralan Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Parti) ve Türkiye'nin yeni lideri –daha önceki pasif ve edilgen politik yaklaşımın aksine- bölge ülkeleriyle daha derin ve proaktif politikalar oluşturmaya başladı. Haliyle söz konusu komşu ülkelerin ve bölge ülkelerinin başında Ortadoğu devletleri gelmekteydi. Ne var ki bu aktif politikayı hayata geçirebilmek ve Ortadoğu'da barışı tesis edebilmek için öncelikle iç siyasi istikrarı ve ekonomik refahı temin etmek gerekmektedir. Bu noktadan hareketle Türk dış politikasını şekillendiren aktörler, Ortadoğu'daki müzmin kaos ve sıkıntılarını sona erdirmek için komşularla sıfır problem sloganıyla aktif bir diplomasi izlemeyi tercih ettiler. Bu makale son yirmi yıllık dönemde Ortadoğu'ya yönelik Türk dış politikasının hangi minvalde ve ne tür dinamikler saikiyle değişip dönüştüğü analiz etmek amacıyla kaleme alınmıştır.

### ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Turkish foreign policy witnessed an almost fundamental change from what it was in the last century, when new worlds emerged in front of Turkey, from the Balkans to the Caucasus and Central Asia through the Middle East. New political approaches have also emerged aimed at inspiring the Ottoman multi-ethnic group formula to reconcile with Turkey's Islamic and Ottoman legacy at home as well as abroad, and within the framework of this new political concept that restored balance to Turkey's regional relations, which it did not attach importance to in the past because of its excessive focus on building solid relations with the European Union and the United States of America. After the Justice and Development Party came to power in Turkey in late 2002, Turkey's new leaders worked to activate the Turkish role in the regional environment surrounding Turkey. The beginning was to establish good relations with neighboring countries in the Middle East. In order to be effective and influential, the new Turkish vision in foreign policy focused on the importance of the internal transformation, especially the consolidation of political and economic stability in the country, as internal reform in Turkey and its growing economic capabilities allowed it to emerge as a sponsor of peace in the Middle East. On this basis, Turkey's leaders have expressed their willingness to pursue active diplomacy in the Middle East in order to reduce or end problems with neighboring countries through a zero-problem policy.

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

*Türk Dış Politikası,  
Ortadoğu,  
Adalet ve Kalkınma  
Partisi,  
Sıfır Problem Politikası,  
Yeni Dünya Düzeni,*

### Keywords:

*Turkish Foreign Policy,  
Middle East,  
Justice and Development  
Party,  
Zero – Problem Policy,  
New World Order,*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey's relationship in the Middle East is highly problematic, as it is schizophrenic, "*rejected*" and "*required*" at the same time, rejected in its republican and perhaps sultanistic life in its recent eras, and required with its cultural and symbolic ties. But its most prominent aspect is related to a relatively wide range of crises, tensions, transformations and stakes, especially what it witnessed in the first decade of the twenty-first century, up to the deep transformations in the time of the "*Arab revolutions*", with all that this entails of change, or a project of change, serious in Mutual perceptions, inter-relations, and regional and international policies (İnaç, 2012:202).

Turkey dealt with the Middle East for several decades through its involvement in the strategies of the West, and it often looked at it with "*Western Eyes*". International changes, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, are among the factors that prompted Turkey to pursue more preoccupied policies in the region (İnaç and Aktaş, 2013:17). It has embarked on an ambitious project for change, but so far it has not reached a foreign policy that is "*independent*" of its "*ambiguous*" and "*confusing*" alliances with the West. This study deals with the problematic relationship between Turkey and the Middle East, given that Turkey is "*from*" the East, but is not "*in*" it? It includes: the course of relations between the two sides during the period of the Justice and Development Party's rule, economic interactions, and Turkey's political interactions in the region, which are represented by the position on the conflicts and alliances in the region.

All threats and changes in the regional and international environments, including political, economic, cultural and security, are considered for Turkey the main reason for its attempt to formulate a geo-cultural approach that works to employ its Ottoman history and the characteristics of its pivotal geopolitical position as a positive and effective balance in the phase of rebuilding a new political theory of the state (İnaç, 2021a:164).

In light of international and regional changes and their impact on the Middle East, and since the Justice and Development Party came to power in Turkey under the leadership of "*Recep Tayyip Erdogan*", "*Abdullah Gul*" and "*Ahmed Davutoglu*", Turkey's new leaders have taken upon themselves the task of adapting Turkish foreign policy. In a manner consistent with the international and regional reality, with the aim of activating its regional role in the Middle East, and thus reshaping its policy towards a number of regional problems (Kalaf, 2010:47-49).

Based on these data and an attempt to understand the aspects of the subject, the problem of this study can be formulated as follows: What is the nature of the Turkish regional role in the Middle East during the era of the Justice and Development Party? In order to answer this problem, the following sub-questions must be answered first: Is the concept of the Middle East a geographical term or does it have another understanding? What is the Justice and Development Party's perception of the Turkish regional role? What are the factors of extending the Turkish role in the Middle East?

## 2. THE MIDDLE EAST IS A POLITICAL OR GEOGRAPHICAL TERM

The term Middle East does not have objective characteristics in terms of spatial definition, as is the case in the terms of Central Asia, Western Europe, or North Africa (Delanty, 2013:74). Therefore, defining this term in an integrated framework requires taking into account the different geocultural, geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic approaches or perspectives. The term Middle East does not build a model in itself as much as it follows definitions that differ according to different angles of view and situations. Above all, defining this region in the east, or considering it one of the middle or near regions, will change according to the party that makes this determination. Therefore, the term "*West Asia or North Africa*", for example, is considered an objective and general geographical limitation, while the term Middle East does not have an objective meaning for people in China or India, because this region is located in the West for them.

The Western policy theorists and makers have derived these terms subjectively, and this is evident in how they use them and the stages in which they appeared, which reflects a state of subjectivity (İnaç and Erdoğan, 2006:14). It was also the beginning of the use of the term "*Middle East*" as a political term, based on the differentiation of the geocultural line that carries a cultural identity rather than as a result of the objective natural geographical characteristics of this region (İnaç, 2018:312). The geopolitician Mahan used the term Middle East for the first time to describe the region between the Arabian Peninsula and India, which bears great importance for maritime strategy, and defining this region, which is taking the Persian Gulf as its center at the present time, is based on strategic characteristics rather than being natural. The term gained wide spread after it was used in

the phrase "*the leadership of the Middle East*" during the First World War as a strategic adjective as well (Lewis, 1994). Therefore, the concept of this term can be defined within the biocultural, geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic frameworks and the politics of the Middle East bear all these diverse characteristics.

Defining the concept of the Middle East in geocultural terms is directly related to the history of the culture of this region. Since the discovery of writing, and the beginning of history, the region that has been called the Middle East is considered the cradle of civilizations, and the point of intersection of civilizations that arose in other regions of the world. The importance of the region as a point of contact at the global level is realized, not only in the field of the movement of commercial goods between East and West, but also in the field of the transfer of cultures, beliefs and civilizations as well (Haviland, 2002:77-79).

This process of multi-directional exchange has made the Middle East a region witnessing the most influential developments and transformations in world history, (*with the exception of the Industrial Revolution that took place outside it*). Therefore, the control of the Middle East has become a necessary step for any country wishing to dominate the world. This necessity triggered forced migrations, cold and hot wars, and many developments and transformations, the impact of which not only appeared on world history and international relations, but also on the cultural conditions of the societies of the region. Therefore, the existence of a multi-directional dynamic structure in the Middle East region that was formed throughout history, as a result of the mutual influences between internal developments and external interventions, continued (Davutoglu, 2014).

The Middle East region contains the basic lines of human history on both the material and spiritual levels, because of its very important strategic location. In it, the first structural changes took place in the physical and economic spheres, from the formation of the first population centers and villages, to the spread of the most rooted religious traditions in human history to the rest of the world. With the exception of the nineteenth century which bears the European imprint and the twentieth century in which there are many centers, it can be said that the Middle East has been a global center throughout history. Because of the intensity of migrations, wars and trade relations. Therefore, we can say that this part of the world is the most region witnessed confrontations between multiple cultures at times, and intermarriage among them at other times.

Since the Seljuks conquered Anatolia in the eleventh century, followed by the Crusades that came in response to this conquest, this region continues to witness cultural diversity to this day. The Middle East also had a special feature, not only as a field of geopolitical influence and intercontinental transmission (İnaç and Sada, 2021:125), but also as a geo-cultural line of communication between East and West. This feature influenced strategists' use of the term Middle East, and led to changes in the areas covered by this term in accordance with international developments. As an example, the domination of Islamic civilization over all parts of the region, which is now called the Middle East, led to the development of the geographical integration of the region into cultural integration (Yiğit vd., 2007:89). From that time until the present, the Middle East has been considered an arena of domination of Islamic civilization so that the concept of the Middle East changes according to the changes that this area of control has undergone from expansion or decline (Davutoğlu, 2014).

The way this term is used, and the historical references related to it, reflect the close relationship between the geocultural structure and the geopolitical structure of the region. Davison (1960:75) conducted a lengthy research on the concept of the Middle East, and after studying all the definitions related to this region since the beginning of the last century, he came to define the Middle East as a geopolitical unit formed around the Islamic religion. The combination of geocultural and geopolitical factors for the concept of the Middle East also appears in the definition of (Hogarth) and (Churchill) on the areas that were under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the last century, starting with Albania and the Balkans. Similarly, to Davison, Ponds identified the two primary conditions of the Middle East as the unity formed around the Islamic faith and the common historical heritage left by the Ottomans (Pounds, 1963).

### **3. THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY'S PERCEPTION FOR THE TURKISH ROLE**

Before discussion the concept of the role, and the AKP's vision of the Turkish regional role, it is necessary to take a look at this party. In August 2001, "Recep Tayyip Erdogan", the former mayor of Istanbul, submitted a request to license his party, which he called (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). Most of the party's founders were members of the Welfare Party led by Necmettin Erbakan. When the Welfare Party was dissolved, the conservatives, led by Necmettin Erbakan, and the reformists led by Abdullah Gul remained in the Virtue Party, until it was also dissolved by a decision of the Constitutional Court.

Its founders adopted what was called "*conservative democracy*", which is a conciliatory political and social system in which modernity is in harmony with heritage on the one hand, and human values with rationality on the other (Budak, 2019:71). The Justice and Development Party do not define itself as an Islamic party. Rather, its leaders classified its intellectual and political identity as being from the center-right, similar to the conservative European parties (İnaç, 2004:38).

The party's Logo is a light bulb. Its official colors are yellow, black and orange. Its supporters called it Akparti, which in Turkish means (white party), a symbol of innocence and purity (İnaç and Yacan, 2018:321). The party's program defined its internal goals in a number of points, most notably: achieving sovereignty for the Turkish people, preserving the unity of the Turkish state, and preserving values and morals that are considered the heritage of the Turkish people. Achieving contemporary civilization and civility in Turkey according to the path charted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, ensuring well-being, security and stability for the Turkish people, and realizing the concept of a social state that allows individuals to live in the required social way, achieving justice among Turks and a fair distribution of national income (Kawli, 2011:61). Among its external goals identified by his program (Celil, 2001:89);

- Continuing political and economic cooperation between Turkey and friendly and allied countries, and intensifying this cooperation, especially in the fields of economy, science, technology, investment and trade.
- Giving special importance to Turkey's relations with Islamic countries, making efforts to increase bilateral cooperation with these countries and pushing the Organization of the Islamic Conference to bring it into a dynamic structure that takes the initiative and can therefore take its prestigious position on the international arena.
- Developing Turkey's policy in the Balkans in light of its historical, cultural and economic relations with the countries of this region and re-crystallizing them if necessary.
- Exerting efforts to provide more protection for the rights of Turkish citizens living abroad.
- Examining opportunities for cooperation in the Caucasus, while excluding the customs of the Cold War period.
- Continuing the efforts aimed at developing a policy with Euro-Asian axes, in addition to the traditional European and Atlantic dimensions of Turkish foreign policy.

As for the concept of the role, there are those who consider it one of the basic tools in the analysis of foreign policy, especially with its ability to combine multiple levels of analysis, and to clarify the overlap between the internal and external environments in the process of making foreign policy. There are those who define the role as one of the components of the foreign policy of states, and it is devoted to the main function or functions that the state performs outside its political borders over a long period of time, in its quest to achieve the objectives of its foreign policy. Accordingly, the regional role does not arise except when the state seeks to play it, and even with a conscious formulation of it. The dimensions of this role are usually related to the foreign policy maker's perceptions of his country's position, the size of its activity and the type of its motives in international politics, as well as his expectations of the size of the change resulting from the exercise of this role (Şadi, 2022:34).

As for the concept of the role, there are those who consider it one of the basic tools in the analysis of foreign policy, especially with its ability to combine multiple levels of analysis, and to clarify the overlap between the internal and external environments in the process of making foreign policy. There are those who define the role as one of the components of the foreign policy of states, and it is devoted to the main function or functions that the state performs outside its political borders over a long period of time, in its quest to achieve the objectives of its foreign policy. Accordingly, the regional role does not arise except when the state seeks to play it, and even with a conscious formulation of it. The dimensions of this role are usually related to the foreign policy maker's perceptions of his country's position, the size of its activity and the type of its motives in international politics, as well as his expectations of the size of the change resulting from the exercise of this role (Kutlay and Öniş, 2021:74).

From here, the foreign policy maker's perceptions gain its importance, especially in determining the areas in which the state is characterized by special influence, as well as determining the degree and level of this influence and the appropriate perceptions it presents for the job at each level, where the possible roles of the state are multiple. It may play an intrusive role in international politics, or its role may be dependent, such as the

role of a protectorate, and the role of the state may be based on conflicting motives such as anti-colonialism, or on cooperative motives such as the roles of regional integration and mediation and others, and the role has four basic characteristics represented in the following;

- It exceeds the limits of perception to be associated with practice.
- It includes the foreign policy maker's perceptions of the roles played by his opponents.

The roles of the state are multiple at the same time, the role of a single state at the international or regional level may vary or differ, and the state's external role has various goals, such as aiming to radically change the current situation, and the role may adopt ideological goals that it defends against other ideological goals, or present a model, such as the state building an internal development model that could constitute a point of attraction for other international powers. By presenting it, the state seeks to gain international influence (Şadi, 2022:51).

As for the Justice and Development government's perception of the Turkish regional role in the Middle East, it is evident from the current Turkish government's keenness to confirm that it possesses an integrated strategic vision towards the various regional circles surrounding Turkey, including the Middle Eastern circle, where the Turkish government follows the conciliatory, equilibrium approach that the Turkish government seeks to be achieved at all regional and international levels. The dimensions of this approach are to focus on the Turkish national strategic, economic and political interests on the one hand (İnaç and Ünal, 2013:227), and to reformulate and present them in a framework that reconciles these interests with the interests of multiple regional powers and the regional system as a whole on the other hand, and between seeking to increase the independence of the Turkish vision as a regional state with its own self-identified interests independently from being subservient to its Western ties on the one hand, and avoiding direct conflict with the visions, interests and arrangements of the United States and the major powers in the region on the other hand (Barkey, 2011:29).

In the same context, Ibrahim Al-Bayoumi Ghaem\* believes that the Turkish role in the Middle East is a matter related to reassessing Turkey's strategic vision and its role in the region, by drawing this role on the ground and in an actual manner and by adopting a set of policies, positions and interventions in the explosive issues in the region. And the actual influence on the ground, and the policies that translate this strategic vision (Litim, 2010:64).

The leaders of the Justice and Development Party also see that the party has a new vision in the field of foreign policy that enables Turkey to play a new role in its regional surroundings, a role that differs from the roles it played previously, but this vision is not an ideological vision, but rather a rational objective vision based on long strategic planning. The term is to maximize the utilization of Turkey's capabilities. According to Erdogan, this vision is characterized by activity, dynamism, decisiveness, rational calculations, and pluralist dependency. Erdogan mentioned in his speech on January 22, 2004 that change is a necessity to keep pace with the changing nature of the world, which explains the government's prioritization of a new vision in foreign policy. In order to move Turkey into the future and turn it into an influential global power (Mawaz, 2015:67).

In the same context, Ahmet Davutoglu, the former foreign minister and the main theoretician of the new Turkish vision, asserts that the decade that followed the Cold War represented a lost decade for Turkey, as the latter did not adopt an integrated vision, contenting itself with a policy of "reactions" or "crisis response". On this basis, the Turkish vision centers on the necessity for Turkey to have a foreign policy directed to each region, with the integration between the dimensions of this policy and its region (Mawaz, 2015:41).

#### **4. THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES OF TURKEY'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY**

Since the Justice and Development Party came to power in November 2002, Turkish foreign policy has witnessed a shift in the nature and patterns of that policy at the regional and global levels, especially since it was not just partial shifts or tactical changes, but had affected on the origins of the strategies followed, as We mentioned earlier that the Middle East has become a priority for Turkish decision-makers (Barkey, 2011:125).

Exposing the new Turkish foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, necessitates, in the first place, the approach to action initiated by the former Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, who followed an initiative and effective foreign policy according to two main tracks: the policy of strategic depth, and the policy of minimizing problems. These two tracks were built. According to his political theories with the aim of studying the foundations of foreign policy theory, the most prominent of these theories are the strategic depth theory and the neo-Ottoman theory (Davutoglu, 2014:64).

#### 4.1. Strategic Depth Theory

This theory is based on a geographical perception that puts an end to the so-called alienation of the Turkish neighboring countries, so that stereotyped perceptions about these countries are referred to the past, in a way that does not constitute an obstacle to Turkey's repositioning in the Middle East, and leads to reformulating the relationship between neighboring countries and other countries, so that the perception based on the fact that Turkish foreign policy should be based on internal security considerations that it saw in neighboring countries as sources of threats, not opportunities, is abandoned. Ahmet Davutoğlu explains in his famous book (*Strategic Depth*) that Turkey should stand at the same distance from all countries and all actors, and avoid entering into any regional alliances or axes, so that it always remains at the same distance from all parties, and contributes to Reassure regional and international players' concerns about Turkish policies (Davutoglu, 2014:54). The Turkish Foreign Minister, Davutoglu identified the foundations and objectives of this theory in (Davutoglu, 2014:63);

- Achieving a balance between freedom and security by guaranteeing and achieving freedom for the Turkish citizen without consequent threats to Turkey's security.
- For Turkey to become active in all the regions to which it considers itself to belong, not in one region to which it belongs.
- Adopting proactive peace policies, which are a proactive strategy to solve problems before they escalate.
- Achieving the principle of zero problems (zero problems) in the regional environment of Turkey.

#### 4.2. The New Ottoman Theory

Neo-Ottomanism is a vision for the renewal of Turkey. This theory dates back to the era of the late Turkish President Turgut Ozal, during the eighties, when it was adopted by Turkish social and political forces. At the present time, it is adopted by the Justice and Development Party, many civil society institutions and sectors of thinkers, intellectuals, and professors Universities, and the neo-Ottomanism is based on three pillars, the first of which are.

For Turkey to reconcile with its Islamic civilization in peace, and to be distinguished by its multicultural and multi-ethnic Ottoman past. The second is the introspection of Ottoman greatness and pride and self-confidence when dealing with foreign policy, and getting rid of the feeling of weakness or inferiority towards others, and the third continuing to open up to the West, while establishing balanced relations with the Islamic East. On the internal level, neo-Ottomanism is intended to restore consideration to the principles of Turkish citizenship through respect for secularism that does not interfere in religious affairs and restores the public sphere to society, while the state is content with organizing it, so that the state, with its various institutions, is closer to the people. As for the external level, it means Ottoman the new combination of soft and hard power, and using them in a balanced way to achieve the goals of Turkish foreign policy.

The content of neo-Ottomanism was explained by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in the context of his talk about the principles of his country's foreign policy towards the world in general, and the Arab world in particular, in his lecture which he delivered at the Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Al-Ahram on February 02, 2009. The Turkish minister confirmed that the Turkish strategy. It finds its true depth in re-integration with its surrounding world, both from the East and from the West, and by going beyond the political borders that isolated the Arab and Islamic peoples from each other for decades. We discovered that we cannot escape from history, just as we cannot change geography (Ganem, 2009:17).

### 5. REASONS FOR CHANGING THE TURKISH ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The reasons for changing the Turkish role in the region can be divided into;

- The great void in the region as a result of the collapse of the so-called Arab national system, in addition to the threats and challenges that Turkey is now facing, most of which stem from the Middle East, especially after the occupation of Iraq, which led to the decline of Turkey's confidence in its allies in NATO and its conviction that they are not concerned with its national security. In the face of challenges emanating from the Middle East region, which can be summarized in: a). The Kurdish challenge escalated, especially

after the Kurds of Iraq obtained a semi-independent status. **b).** *The escalation of the Iranian challenge:* As the occupation of Iraq resulted in removing it from the equation of Iran's regional balance, which led to the increase in its influence in the region, then Turkey realizes that playing a regional role in the region means participating in defining the regional agenda and reaching the Turkish defense lines as far as possible from Turkish territory (Khan, 2015:31).

- ***The American Role in the Region Faltered:*** the decline in the American role in the region resulted in giving a margin of movement for the forces in the region to benefit from it, and in this context, come the Turkish moves with Iran, Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.
- ***Efforts to Join the European Union Have Faltered:*** Christian Europe still carries in its Turkish relations the legacy of the Ottoman-European conflict since 1453, as Europe sees that Turkey has no place in the European civilizational project because it is culturally different from it, the one hand, and on the other hand, the European Union believes that Turkey's accession will make the union common borders with the Middle East, which is full of obligations (Iran, Iraq and Syria) and involve it in its policies (İnaç, 2007:28). On the other hand, Turkey realizes that its increasing regional role in the region will lead to a significant improvement in Turkey's image in the European Union, as it will be the advanced safety valve the geographical hubs of the European Union (Khan, 2015:43).
- Turkey's regional expansion in the region with political costs that are much lower than the political return that it manifests, so that the strategic feasibility of playing this role is fully realized in the case of the Middle East. It suffices here to refer to the Iranian regional role in which Iran has invested financially and ideologically to build a network of alliances with states, movements and political parties for a period of thirty years. The comparison between the spheres of influence owned by each party indicates that Turkey is competing with Iran with new tools, but with a much lower political cost than Iran (Özcan vd., 2015).
- The Middle East is the only geographical area in the vicinity of Turkey in which it can play a regional role without clashing with global powers, compared to the Caucasus, where the Russian influence is, or in Albania and Bosnia, where the European influence is.
- The positive image of Turkey among large Arab segments, and the unprecedented welcome for this role, from the widest Arab sectors, with a Turkish role in the region for the first time since the establishment of the Republic in 1923. It came to the point of talking about the "*Turkish Model*" and the need to benefit from the lessons it offers, such as peaceful alternation On the authority, the integration of Islamic currents into the democratic process, and not least the expansion of the margin of maneuver under the roof of the alliance with the only global power (Khan, 2015:52).
- The Arab nations are first and foremost an ideal market for Turkish goods, which are provided in the area with a competitiveness that they may not always enjoy on the European market. This sums up the Turkish national interests in the region. Turkey, which has a growing need for oil and gas, finds the Arab area to be particularly attractive due to its energy resources. The two fundamental elements that characterize Turkey's strategic position are the expanding economic potential of Turkey and Turkey's desire to serve as a hub for energy supply to Europe.

## 6. THE NEW TURKISH POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THE "*INDISPENSABLE BACK GARDEN*"

Professor Aykut Kansu says, "... *Turkey's relationship with the East is not an emergency, and its return with all its enthusiasm is nothing but another kind of discovery, not only for the East, but for itself and its components as well. The East was originally a starting point and was not only a destination or a stable...*" (Kansu, 1999:27).

The great and rapid transformation in Turkey's foreign policy was represented by the adoption of the vision of "*Ahmed Davutoglu*", which aims to redefine Turkey's role in the region, which he formulated in the concept of strategic depth. With the policy of zeroing conflicts emanating from this vision, a revolution took place in a number of Turkish foreign policy, as Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East became based on a set of principles pertaining with the security for all, zero conflicts, political openness, peaceful cultural coexistence and interdependence Economic (Mawaz, 2015:27).

The spread of Turkish soft power, which had a great impact in upgrading Turkey's role and position in the Middle East, helped in developing its relations not only with Arab regimes, but with their peoples in the first place, especially when it was reinforced by popular diplomacy and by criticizing the Israeli position towards the

Palestinians. One of the forms of Turkey's new foreign policy in the Middle East is building good and strategic relations with neighboring Syria, as this relationship is considered one of the most prominent achievements of the Justice and Development Party since it came to power, after the two countries were on the brink of war in 1998, so the Syrian president visited Bashar al-Assad, Turkey in 2004, and former Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer responded with a visit in 2005, despite the strong American objection by the administration of "George Bush Jr.", which was tightening the siege and political and diplomatic isolation on Syria (Eldüzi, 2016:12).

Another form of this new policy is communication with Hamas after its victory in the legislative elections in early 2007, and an attempt to integrate the movement into the peaceful political process instead of besieging and isolating it. On the other hand, the Turkish leadership led mediation between the Palestinian Authority and "Israel" on November 4, 2007, allowing "Israeli" President Shimon Peres to deliver a speech before the Turkish parliament, to be the first "Israeli" official to speak in the parliament of a Muslim country.

As for the Turkish-"Israeli" relations, the arrival of the Justice and Development Party to power in Turkey on November 4, 2002 marked the beginning of a new phase in these relations, the interactions of which are still taking place until now. On the eve of those elections, "Israel" did not hide its concern and fear that the arrival of the Justice and Development Party might change Turkey's relations with "Israel". After the Justice and Development Party won those elections by a large majority, this fear increased, as these relations actually witnessed a gradual erosion and decline, but they continued in their relations, after a short time that these relations transformed in their quality and nature from the alliance relations that prevailed between the two countries during the period 1993 and 2003 to relations of contradiction and clash. Despite the moderate and neutral Turkish position on the parties to the Arab-Zionist conflict, and the policy of minimizing the problems followed by Ankara, Turkish relations with "Israel" entered a phase characterized by apathy due to the "Israeli" entity's use of excessive armed force against the Palestinians since the war on Gaza in 2009, Large sectors of the Turkish political elites supported the official Turkish position condemning the practices of the Israeli occupation. During the three weeks of the Gaza war, which began after six months of calm between "Israel" and Hamas, Turkey took a different turn after its prime minister blamed heavily. On Israel since the first day of the attack on Gaza, the Turkish criticism reached its climax at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, when the Turkish Prime Minister violently left the podium after a heated discussion with "Israeli" President Shimon Peres (Barkey, 2011:90).

In order to show solidarity with the Palestinian position calling for lifting the siege on Gaza, Turkey sent a humanitarian aid ship to it, which "Israel" confronted with armed force, killing nine Turkish people and forcing the ship to return to Turkey, a situation that sparked a wave of resentment against the Israeli entity on the Turkish popular and official levels, which demanded that "Israel" present an official apology to it and financial compensation to the families of the victims, which was rejected by "Israel", which called on Turkey to expel the "Israeli" ambassador and suspend relations with it until it responds to the Turkish conditions, all of that was the reason behind the deterioration in relations (Benli Altunışık, 2020).

However, it seems that the recent visit of Israeli President Herstog to Turkey on March 9, 2022 will be a sign of a transformation in the course of bilateral relations between the two countries, as President Erdogan said in a joint press conference between the two presidents in Ankara, "*President Herstog's visit to Ankara is a historic visit and A new turning point in relations*". The Israeli president continued during the conference by saying, "*We do not agree on all issues... but we hope to resolve our differences with mutual respect and goodwill*" (İnaç, 2014:39).

As for the Lebanese file, Turkey seeks to find official and popular Arab acceptance for its role in the region, and in this context, Lebanon was an appropriate arena for a Turkish move that suggests Ankara's ability to play a regional role in the region, considering that Lebanon represents one of the main hot issues in which the internal, regional and international dimensions are intertwined. Lebanon is also one of the pillars of the Iranian role in the region, and it represents an arena and a first line of confrontation between Iran on the one hand and the United States and Israel on the other, which culminated in the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in July 2006, which strengthened the Iranian role in the region, and in this context, Turkey seeks To play a role in Lebanon to balance the Iranian role in the region, and it seeks to play this role through Syria and its traditional influence in Lebanon, as Turkey sees that just as Syria was Iran's bridge to Lebanon, it can also be a bridge for Turkey in Lebanon (Benli Altunışık, 2020:37).

Turkey also tried to contribute and cooperate with France in resolving the recent Lebanese political crisis in light of its ability to communicate with Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia, in return for its non-opposition to joining



the European Union, and Turkey, through its role in Lebanon, tried to prove that its accession to the European Union would support European interests and stability in the region. On the other hand, Turkey realizes that it is in its interest to stabilize the situation in Lebanon, especially since the latter is an arena for confrontation between the opposition regime (Iran, Syria, Hezbollah) on one side, and the United States and Israel on the other (Litim, 2010:81).

As for the Kurdish file, *“as it is not only a local issue, but rather a regional one due to the Kurdish spread in more than one country neighboring Turkey”* the Kurdish problem in Turkey is one of the intractable problems of the successive Turkish governments since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 AD. Realizing the vision of the Justice and Development Party that Turkey cannot play a regional role unless it secures the Turkish interior, as the party adopted the slogan launched by *“Mustafa Kemal Atatürk” (Peace at home and peace abroad)*. Without peace at home, no sustainable peace can be achieved in outside. Hence the initiative launched by Prime Minister *“Recep Tayyip Erdoğan”* in early November 2009 with his democratic openness to 15 million Turkish Kurds, considering that reconciliation with the Kurds is a necessity that cannot be avoided, no matter how difficult it is. Which aims to make Turkey a major player in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus by mediating disputes and strengthening economic and trade ties with Syria, Iraq and Iran (Benli Altunışık, 2020:19-21).

With the beginning of 2011, a change took place in both Turkish foreign policy and the role that Ankara plays in regional politics, as the Arab Spring, beginning in 2011, posed a real challenge to the Turkish foreign policy strategy. The revolutions in the Arab world were unexpected for Ankara. This was the reason in the beginning; Erdoğan's government was not decisive about how to respond to these popular uprisings, like the governments of most countries in the world. However, one thing was clear, and that was to stand in the side of the legitimate popular demands in these countries. The framework of this support differed from one case to another, and this showed how the Turkish Prime Minister responded to the challenges that faced his foreign policy in the region as a result of the popular movement of more than one Arab country (İnaç, 2022:210).

For example, despite Ankara's good relations with the Syrian regime, in addition to the many fears of chaos, sectarian war, or external interference, it contributed to the failure to criticize the regime in a clear and direct manner at the beginning of the Syrian revolution and to follow the gradual method in the belief that it is possible to influence this regime. He pushed him towards reforms, but the loss of hope from any reform that the Syrian regime would undertake, and Ankara's enjoyment of popular ground inside Syria, prompted it to pay its criticisms to him (Bakir, 2011:95).

As for the Turkish role in Iraq, during the years following the occupation, Iraq became one of the most prominent issues of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's policy towards Iraq includes two main dimensions: The Kurdish issue and Turkey's quest to be a major energy transit to Europe.

### **6.1. Turkey's Policy towards the Kurdish Issue**

Turkish foreign policy deals with the Kurdish issue, as we explained earlier according to the following principles (Litim, 2010:41);

- The liquidation of the PKK and depriving it of finding a safe haven in northern Iraq, especially in light of Turkey's completion of the Kurdistan Regional Government supporting the PKK.
- Preventing the division of Iraq on a sectarian or ethnic basis that could lead to the emergence of an independent Kurdish state or a confederation, with the oil-rich city of Kirkuk as its capital.

The features of Turkish policy towards Iraq were clarified in Erdoğan's speech to his party deputies on January 9, 2007, in which he emphasized support for Iraq's unity, rejecting its division, correcting imbalances between ethnic groups, and the necessity of the central government's exclusive supervision of oil wealth and other natural resources.

## 6.2. Turkey's Quest to be an Energy Gateway to Europe

Turkey sought to be a transit point for energy from Iraq to Europe through the establishment of the Strategic Cooperation Council between Turkey and Iraq, which aims to;

- Exploration for oil in southern Iraq, where the "*Turkey State Oil Company*" obtained the concession to explore for and market oil in southern Iraq. Washington supported this agreement as a means to prevent Turkey from concluding energy agreements with Iran (İnaç and Erdoğan, 2006:13).
- Increasing the capacity of the existing oil pipeline between Kirkuk and Ceyhan, according to an agreement with the Iraqi government, from about 800,000 barrels per day to about one million barrels.
- Establishing a pipeline network to transport natural gas from Iraq to international markets through Turkey.

To achieve these goals, Turkey has opened wide-ranging channels of communication with the Sunni and Shiist Arab forces and leaders, including the resistance forces, and Turkey has become a member in the meetings of the countries neighboring Iraq (İnaç, 2014:3).

## 7. FACTORS EXTENDING THE TURKISH ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Many factors have contributed to the growth and expansion of Turkey's regional role in its Middle East surroundings, and its acceptance by the countries and peoples of the region. The most prominent of these factors are;

- The Islamic roots of the ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey, and transcending Arab fears from the sharp secular trends of Turkey prior to the rule of the Justice and Development Party.
- Arab weakness and impotence played a role in accepting the Turkish role.
- The fears of some countries in the region, especially Syria, Iraq and Iran, of the establishment of a Kurdish state in the region, especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.
- The Arab countries of the Middle East fear the growing regional role of Iran, especially with the growing Iranian influence in the region, especially in Iraq, Lebanon through Hezbollah and Palestine through the resistance factions, especially the Islamic Resistance Movement ( Hamas). Which led these countries to strengthen their relations with Turkey and accept its role in the region to play a counter-role that curbs Iran's influence.
- The Turkish position is moderate and neutral from all parties to the inter-Arab or Western Arab conflicts, and the premise of this policy is that any relationship with the power of one party to a conflict does not mean hostility to the other power in same conflict (İnaç, 2016:79-81). Through this policy, Turkey has woven the best relations with everyone without exception, with Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas in Palestine, with the Palestinians and "Israelis", with Iran and the West, with Syria and "Israel".
- The support of the United States of America for Turkey's role in the Middle East region as a strategic ally that cannot be neglected, as the first and second are considered one of the important keys to American policy in the Middle East region, and its pivotal role in maintaining stability is the belt extending from central Europe to the borders of Russia and India.
- The success of the Turkish experiment and considering it a successful model that Arab countries can emulate, as the Turkish model is based on three basic values: democracy, secularism and Islam (İnaç, 2016:78).

## 8. CONCLUSION

In the end and from the foregoing, we conclude that it is important to realize that the constants of the traditional Turkish foreign policy will not change in a fundamental way, but rather what the Turkish foreign policy is witnessing is a re-adjustment, not a major transformation.

Turkey will not sever its relations with the Hebrew state, will not leave NATO, and will not change its orientation towards membership in the European Union. More transformations in the Turkish foreign policy will come in response to the national interests of the state and the pressures of Turkish public opinion. But Turkey, besides that, will work hard to assert its regional role and strengthen its Arab and Islamic relations with the peoples of Turkish origin. The new Turkish case is a partial repositioning, but it is undoubtedly significant, if one considers the traditions established by the republican system of foreign relations throughout most of the twentieth century. What the Arab side should do is deal with Turkey on this basis, trying to see what can benefit the Arabs from the Turkish-Western and Israeli relations, instead of seeing these relations as an obstacle to the progress of Arab-Turkish relations (İnaç, 2021:11).

In this context, Turkish democracy experiment we analyzed briefly, three main criteria are essential to be source of inspiration to the Middle East. First criteria is social experience inherited by past history, second one is will to be a source of inspiration and the last one is reliability and prestige. The Turkish practice to harmonize Islam and democracy and provide the economic development in accompanying with the social cohesion and offer a very liberal secularism approve that Turkey has adequate democracy experience as a stability island within his geography. Eventually Turkey seemingly established the essential organizations and institutions for the sake of the development of democracy, constituted a functional mechanism and constructed a coherent communication channel and civil society to regulate strong ties between the governing and governed. In addition, Turkish experience demonstrated that the secularism means nothing alone but it gains meaning with its liberal definition and within the working democratic regime. Under these circumstances, Turkey was never indifferent to the democratic evolution of the Middle Eastern countries. He generously shared his all experience and supported the peoples of Arab Spring who desire for democracy against the dictatorial regimes. Having imperial past and multicultural structure of society Turkey İNAÇ, Hüsametdin - What Does Turkey Promise for the Middle East and North Africa? 4 proved that he is the bridge amidst the civilizations and a monument of tolerance among the cultures. Lastly, his rejection of March 1st memorandum against the US in 2003, “one-minute” stake against the Israel in Davos Economic Summit of 2009, his active participation to enhance the Syrian democracy, his unique opposition against Sisi military intervention of Egypt prove the will of Turkey to support the democratic transition period in the Middle East. In addition, Operations Euphrates Shield, Idlib and Olive Branch made Turkey one of the leading figures in constituting a democratic Syria as well.

## REFERENCES

- BAKIR, Ali Hüseyin (2011), **Türkiye - İran Denklemine Suriye Devrimi: Mevcut Çıkmaz ve Beklenen Senaryolar**, Elmerkez Alarabi Llabhas ve Eldirasat El'siyasiye, Al Sareeh.
- BARKEY, Henry J. (2011), **Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East**, Sciences Po University Publisher, Paris.
- BENLİ ALTUNIŞIK, Meliha (2020), “*The New Turn in Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Regional and Domestic insecurities*”, **Istituto Affari Internazionali**, S.20(17), ss.1-22.
- BUDAK, Ali (2019), **Osmanlı Modernleşmesi Gazetecilik ve Edebiyat**, Bilge Kültür Sanat Yayınları, İstanbul.
- CELİL, Tarek Abd (2001), **Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi Programı**, Kahire Türk Araştırmaları Merkezi Yayını, Kahire.
- DAVISON, Roderic H. (1960), “*Where is the Middle East?*”, **Foreign Affairs**, S.38(4), ss.665-675.
- DAVUTOĞLU, Ahmet (2014), **Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position**, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul.
- DELANTY, Gerard (2013), **Avrupa'nın İcadı** (Çev. Hüsametdin İnaç), Adres Yayınları, Ankara.

- ELDÜZİ, Walid (2016), “*Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu'daki Bölgesel Rolü*”, **Al-Bahith Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi**, S.3, ss.10-27.
- GANEM, Ibrahim Al-bayoumi (2009), “*Elistraticiyeye El'Türkiye ve El'Usmaniye El'Cedide*”, **Elahram Elyuumi**, S.7, ss.14-33.
- HAVILAND, William A. (2002), **Kültürel Antropoloji** (Çev. Hüsamettin İNAÇ), Kaknüs Yayınları, İstanbul.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2004), “*Identity Problems of Turkey During the European Union Integration Process*”, **Journal of Economic and Social Research**, S.6(2), ss.33-62.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2007), “*Rethinking Democracy and Governance in the EU*”, **Journal of Academic Studies**, S.9(32), ss.1-31.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2012), “*Transformation of Arabic Identity During the Arab Spring*”, **International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences**, S.2(23), ss.199-204.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2014), “*Çağımızın Toplumsal Algısını Temsil Eden Parametreler*”, **İslam Medeniyeti Araştırmaları Dergisi**, S.1(1), ss.35-57.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2016), **Türkiye'nin Kimlik Problemleri**, Adres Yayınları, Ankara.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2018), “*The Possibility of Multicultural Practice During The Age of Collective Identities in Line with Arab Spring*”, **Akademik Bakış Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi**, S.65, ss.306-315.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2021), “*What Does Turkey Promise for the Middle East and North Africa?*”, **Türk Kamu Yönetimi Dergisi**, S.1(1), ss.1-13.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2021a), **Uluslararası Güvenlik, Yenidünya Düzeni ve Türkiye**, Bilge Kültür Sanat Yayınları, İstanbul.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin (2022), “*New World Order in Post-Pandemic Process and Turkey*”, **Turkey and the Post-Pandemic World Order** (Ed. Ahmet Salih İkiz), Lexington Books Publisher, Maryland, ss.199-225.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin and AKTAŞ, Fatih (2013), “*11 Eylül 2001 Terör Saldırılarının Amerikan Güvenlik Bürokrasisine Etkileri*”, **Akademik Bakış Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler E-Dergisi**, S.34, ss.1-19.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin and ERDOĞAN, Selami (2006), “*Postmodern Dönemde Kamu Yönetimi Algısı ve Kamusal Alan Tartışmaları*”, **Akademik Bakış Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler E-Dergisi**, S.9, ss.1-16.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin and SADA, Mohammed Rafiq (2021), **Taliban'ın Afganistan'ı: Devlet, Toplum, Siyaset**, Bilge Kültür Sanat Yayınları, İstanbul.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin and ÜNAL, Feyzullah (2013), “*The Construction of National Identity in Modern Times: Theoretical Perspective*”, **International Journal of Humanities and Social Science**, S.3(11), ss.223-232.
- İNAC, Hüsamettin and YACAN, İbrahim (2018), “*Ülkelerin Markalaşma Süreci ve Marka Kavramı*”, **Uluslararası Yönetim Akademisi Dergisi**, S.1(3), ss.317-331.
- KALAF, Arif Mouhammad (2010), “*Türkiye'nin Bölgesel Rolü*”, **Meceltül Cameet Tikrit İl'Elulum el Kanuniye Velsiyasiye**, S.5, ss.40-64.
- KANSU, Aykut (1999), **Politics in Post-Revolutionary Turkey, 1908-1913**, Brill Publisher, Leiden.
- KAWLI, Meaamer (2011), **Elislah Eldahili fi Türkiye**, Elmerkez Alarabi llabhas ve Eldirasat el'Siyasiye, Doha (Katar).
- KHAN, Sheharyar (2015), “*The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East*”, **Policy Perspectives**, S.12(1), ss.31-50.
- KUTLAY, Mustafa ve ÖNİŞ, Ziya (2021), “*Turkish Foreign Policy in a Post-Western Order: Strategic Autonomy or New Forms of Dependence?*”, **International Affairs**, S.97(4), ss.1085-1104.

- LEWIS, Bernard (1994), **The Shaping of the Modern Middle East**, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- LITİM, Fatiha (2010), “*Türkiye ve Yeni Bölgesel Rölü*”, **Meceltu Elmufakir**, S.210, ss.62-89.
- MAWAD, Ali Calale (2015), “*Alruwyat Alturkiat Lilamin Alaqalimi Fi Mintaqat Alsharq Alawist*”, **Majalat Awraq Alsharq Alawsat**, S.106, ss.42-61.
- MESLIT, Saad Abd el-Aziz (2008), “*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin Türkiye'deki Siyasi Projesi*”, **Majalat Dirasat Aqalimia**, S.5(6), ss.114-132.
- ÖZCAN, Mesut, KÖSE, Talha and KARAKOÇ, Ekrem (2015), “*Assessments of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East During the Arab Uprisings*”, **Turkish Studies**, S.16(2), ss.195-218.
- POUNDS, Norman John Greville (1963), **An Atlas of the Middle Eastern Affairs**, Praeger Publisher, New York (US).
- ŞADİ, İman (2022), “*Digital Ahram*”, **Diigital Ahram Corporate Website**, <http://digital.ahram.org.eg/articles.aspx?Serial=149837&eid=1529-2022/02/02> (Erişim Tarihi: 03.06.2022).
- YİĞİT, Mehmet, İNAÇ, Hüsamettin and GÜNER, Ümit (2007), “*Genişleme, Mali Yardım ve Ekonomik Büyüme Perspektiflerinden AB'nin İlk Dört Genişlemesinin Analizi*”, **Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi**, S.8(2), ss.81-96.

