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TURKISH THINK TANKS, THE AKP’S POLICY NETWORK FROM NEO-GRAMSCIAN AND NEO-OTTOMAN ANGLES

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Turkish Think Tanks, the AKP's Policy Network from Neo-Gramscian and Neo-Ottoman Angles

According to Ismet Inönü, the Turks accomplished a successful war of liberation, as they fought for real freedoms of a real people, who represented the established way of life in Anatolia against the increasing ambition of an arbitrary Ottoman power and attempted to moderate their government in tune with nature. They never lost of sight the task of government to protect the citizen in the pursuit of his or her national ideals.

With Kemalism, Turkish nationalism was officially declared for the first time in history: Turkey wrote a new history in the use of a hitherto unknown political system in the Islamic world which should combine economic progress with westernization. In accordance with neo-Ottomanism Turkey was chosen through its role model to other nations to end in the region the rule of tyrants, kings, autocrats, and oligarchs. The Ottoman Empire was known for an egalitarianism of its citizens including its religious minorities. Thus, the peoples‘ education is in Kemalist credo a god-given right for developing the work qualifications of every citizen. The Turk should be his own master, who sharpens his mind through education and is mindful of his dignity. Kemalism declines to recognize a sultan, aristocracy or privileged classes. Religious freedom guarantees non-Muslim minorities their faith as stated in the Lausanne agreement.

The Ottoman political system completely differentiated itself from those of Europe. The fast territorial expansion of the Empire in Europe and in the Near East; the absorption of new peoples into the Empire, the Decline beginning in the 18th century and the magnitude of the Empire attracted the attention of European powers which resulted in the appliance of the balance-of-power doctrine on the continent for counterbalancing Russia’s advance in the Balkans and the Black Sea region. In the European wars the Ottomans took part. Thus, Mustafa Kemal underlined that Turkey should seek good relations with all nations keeping in mind that it would never tolerate silently any European intervention in Anatolia and resist this. In this sense, Ahmet Davutoğlu broadens the scope of the Kemalist slogan ‘peace at home, peace abroad’ in his Strategic Depth Doctrine to the former Ottoman territories: a milestone in his good-neighbour policy with neighbors. Therefore it comes to no surprise that Prime Minister Davutoğlu rebuked Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu’s criticism, the Kemalist CHP party leader, that the Ottoman Empire had in any occasion not become a “German puppet” (Alman Kuklasi) as the opposition leader had claimed referring to the Ottoman war entry on the side of the Axis powers. The historian Ilber Ortayli even cites Mustafa Kemal’s report to the Ottoman General Staff with the warning, that „despite of an Ottoman victory in the First World War the Empire would turn into a German colony. “ Kemal was an adjutant to the German Marshall Otto Liman von Sanders.

Critics mention that neo-Ottomanism was revived because it seeks to reconcile Turkish imperialism with an extreme benevolent national self-image. Such a fusion of exceptionalism enables the AKP to denounce its domestic and foreign opponents. In the opening of new markets and trade to anticipate European powers, Turkey must show it can establish its own version of a
liberal democracy based on rule of law with a clear separation of religion from the state. Yet during Mr. Erdoğan’s time in office the century-long drive to create such a model state has entered a critical stage. A counter-narrative is gaining ground, contending that the decision of past generations of ruling elites to anchor the country firmly in the west was mistaken. Not only will Turkey be shunned by Europe, according to this view - but, worse, westernization has disconnected the country from its Islamic heritage and undermined its ability to achieve its manifest destiny of leading the Islamic civilization. This counter-narrative champions a return to past greatness by restoring Turkey’s religious identity.

The diffusion of Turkish soft power is founded on economic progress which may also explain the proliferation of the number of think tanks. Think tanks can be found more often in developed countries, where democratic principles are upheld. In American reading, the existence of research institutes represents the embodiment of a democratic civic society and prosperity. A diversity of organizations, where there exists no monopoly of one think tank in political advocacy, strengthens the democratic operating mode of society as citizens are educated and public debate stimulated. In Turkey, 31 think tanks rival for political influence in Turkish politics. In my book, I developed my central hypothesis that two conservative advocacy tanks, SETA and USAK, have immediate access to power-brokers in the ruling party, the AKP, and its associates in state institutions, media and Muslim corporations. Therefore, the question remains whether this conservative counter-establishment with its monopoly in policy-making endangers the newly-flourishing democracy in Turkey.

National and intellectual elites but also decision-makers studied at US universities or did fellowships at think tanks like Turkish political scientists. These academics then established similar institutions in their home countries. Institutes like the IKV, TESEV and TEPAV obtain financial support from the EU, German party foundations and US foundations. The Open Society Institute of the US philanthroph George Soros, the Carnegie Endowment in Moscow but also the Ford Foundation have financed in eastern and central Europe and in Turkey as well liberal research institutes for taking a leadership role in the democratization process and the change of command economies into free-market economies following western role models. These donors aimed at integrating formerly authoritarian regimes firmly in the western camp.

My paper will show how the AKP’s utilization of political Islam together with framing of neo-Ottomanism as a prerequisite for its opening to the Muslim world as the former Ottoman lands in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Arab Peninsula exacerbate tensions with its western partners. At the domestic politics level, the Islamic-conservative Justice and Development Party is generally accepted more libertarian than its predecessor the Islamist Welfare party with a platform based on strong national security, free markets and social and fiscal conservatism. The Islamists and the libertarians are often competing for influence in the AKP. My study counters the neo-Gramscian theory by illuminating how policy-planning organisations mobilized this rivalry for influence within the party which reshaped the foreign policy agendas in a time of political transformation and regional crises after the Arab Spring. In addition to preparing papers
drawing on this postdoctoral work, a concrete goal was to convert my research in the US into a book entitled “Think Tanks, Game-Changers in Turkish Foreign Policy?”

**Network of Think Tanks and Neo-Gramscianism**

In this context, elite theorists and neomarxist criticism of think tanks should not be forgotten as elites safeguard their power and class interests through partisan studies by excluding the citizens’ from the policy-making process. Think tanks can thus create a closed and secret environment for the ruling class. To the exclusion of the public, scholars’ prestige may obliterate contributions from more democratic sources. This criticism converges with those ideas elaborated by the Italian Communist party leader Antonio Gramsci. For Gramsci culture was fundamental to the attainment of power that *cultural hegemony* be achieved first. In Gramsci's view, a class cannot dominate in modern conditions by merely advancing its own narrow economic interests. Neither can it dominate purely through force and coercion. Rather, it must exert intellectual and moral leadership, and make alliances and compromises with a variety of forces. Gramsci calls this union of social forces a "historic bloc". This bloc forms the basis of consent to a certain social order, which produces and re-produces the hegemony of the dominant class through a nexus of institutions, social relations, and ideas. In this manner, Gramsci developed a theory that emphasized the importance of the political and ideological superstructure in both maintaining and fracturing relations of the economic base. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is tied to his conception of the capitalist state. Gramsci does not understand the ‘state' in the narrow sense of the government. Instead, he divides it between 'political society' – the arena of political institutions and legal constitutional control – and 'civil society'– commonly seen as the 'private' or 'non-state' sphere, mediating between the state and the economy. He stresses, however, that the division is purely conceptual and that the two, in reality, often overlap. The capitalist state, Gramsci claims, rules through force plus consent: political society is the realm of force and civil society is the realm of consent.

Gramsci argues that intellectuals play a vital role in developing their specific social group’s or class’s economic, political, and social self-awareness and ideas about organizing society, so as to better consolidate class positions. With cultural hegemony Gramsci describes the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, manipulating the culture of society - the beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and mores - so that their ruling-class worldview becomes the worldview that is imposed and accepted as the cultural norm; as the universally valid dominant ideology that justifies the social, political, and economic *status quo* as natural, inevitable, perpetual and beneficial for everyone, rather than as artificial social constructs that benefit only the ruling class.

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In the Turkish case, conservative think tank scholars advocate political Islam in the interest not only of the ruling party but also the so-called Muslim entrepreneurs from Anatolia organized in MÜSİAD under the AKP’s auspices. These intellectuals’ own ideological development is determined by their Islamic socialization and not by their postgraduate studies in the US and the EU as their research and political advocacy has proven with strong ties to a variety of societal groups. Islamic philanthropic foundations have attempted to create strong networks precisely to recruit and mobilize the most promising academic intellectuals for implementing economic and political projects in domestic and foreign affairs to the benefit of their donors. The large-scale funding programs of religious foundations prove very attractive to researchers and influence the selection of research topics, research questions, and policy proposals. This infrastructure develops a system of flows of scholars, ideas, and money suited to the maintenance of the AKP’s existing hierarchy and ascendancy throughout bureaucracy and ministries. The Justice and Development Party uses this network to replace Gülenist bureaucrats with its own loyalist scholars. In this way, their relative moderate ideas may become diluted, domesticated, and metamorphosed into incremental reforms that fail to address the structural weaknesses and fault lines in domestic and foreign policies combating and oppressing alternatives from liberal rivals, as the failure to reset the zero problems policy with neighbors has amply demonstrated. Add the fact that Turkey under Erdoğan has become increasingly authoritarian, and it becomes apparent that the country is drifting away from its alliance with the west.

This boosts the Gramscian argument that SETA and USAK represent a group of public intellectuals who tend to see the problems of state and society from the perspectives of the government party and its allied elites that sustain them. These advocacy tanks are completely immersed in policy-planning organizations that reside very close to the centers of Islamic elite power. Both think tanks nurture scholars who dislike liberal and critical thought and action from rival ‘outsiders’. Nevertheless, these institutes claim to be above party politics rejecting criticism to constitute statist forces and to prevent progress, reform and change in Turkish politics. In my view, SETA and USAK remain bound by ‘orthodoxy’ which results in conservative methods rather than innovative policies preserving powerful continuities and interests in safeguarding patterns of power and influence within the policy-making community, the academia, the media and the Muslim businesses. In effect, networks show how elite hegemony actually ‘works’ how ‘power works’ in the AKP machinery.

According to elite theorists like Joseph Peschek, Thomas Dye and William Domhoff, think tanks constitute key actors of the ‘power elite’. The decision-making authority is concentrated in the hands of a small circle of business leaders, politicians and opinion-makers. Their pursuit of free enterprise without state interference challenges the state. Capital, citing Diane Stone and Mark Garnett, attempts by way of ‘hegemonic projects’, to preserve privileges and cash in profits. In neomarxist classification think tanks thus function as ruling instruments of the capitalist class which serve to align it in economy, media and politics to a common course of
action and influence the public in its favor. Generally, think tanks in their early years were ascribed the role of enlightening the nation and informing the policy-makers without selfish motives and financial benefits. In their political advocacy for industry, politics and media, these institutes save their clients much time allowing them to accomplish more important tasks. Consequently, critics assume from the access of conservative scholars to the power centers in all sectors of society that elite rule founds on the policy entrepreneurship of the advocacy tanks. Conservative intellectuals are said to mobilize public opinion in Turkey and among foreign elites to upset the European consensus on monetarism.

Political Islam defines democracy as free enterprise in free-market economics. Democracy offers the middle-class society domestic peace through entrepreneurial freedoms. That is why the Islamic right rejects social reallocation of wealth, the fixing of minimum wages by the state in accordance with trade union but also the concept of tax progressivity, taxing the rich in higher rates than the poor. Referring to Milton Friedman, the economic godfather of neocons, trade unions are made responsible with their wage policy for unemployment which leads the Islamists in fierce opposition to the organized interests of the working class. Nevertheless, Gramsci proffers that under modern capitalism, the bourgeoisie can maintain its economic control by allowing certain demands made by trade unions and mass political parties within civil society to be met by the political sphere. Thus, the bourgeoisie engages in passive revolution by going beyond its immediate economic interests and allowing the forms of its cultural hegemony to change.

The Effects of Economic Downturn

Between 2002 and 2006, during the first term of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), growth averaged 7.2 percent per year. This economic growth significantly benefited the AKP, helping it to win three consecutive parliamentary elections (in 2002, 2007, and 2011) with overwhelming majorities. The positive steps the AKP took after 2002 — continuing the IMF-led reforms initiated by Kemal Derviş and maintaining a responsible fiscal and monetary policy — helped the country achieve the macroeconomic stability necessary to attract foreign capital. In particular, after a decade marred by a series of failed coalition governments, the new era of political continuity ushered in by the AKP heartened both domestic and foreign investors.

The AKPnomics stand for the lowering of the state quota, the state’s share in the economy, for limited public social benefits such as child care benefits and pension funds and for the central bank’s policies which forces the industry to rationalization and consolidation. Free-market economics shall spread through free trade, privatization and the abolition of customs and greater

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3 Ibid., p. 16.
economic freedom resulting in liberalization and democracy in the Near East whereby Turkish corporations gain their fair share according to the neoliberal strategist Kemal Derviş.

Foreign investors and observers are growing increasingly nervous about the increasingly authoritarian nature of President Erdoğan and the AKP government. Since the government crackdown on the Gezi protests in 2013, its democratic trajectory has taken a marked turn for the worse. Significant deterioration in crucial indicators such as rule of law, freedom of speech, judicial independence, media freedom, and checks and balances have further shaken the confidence of investors. Turkey’s rankings in corruption prevention and perception indices have slumped. Since the corruption probe at the end of 2013 Turkey turned from an exemplary emerging market into a country that grabs headlines with stories of economic weakness and financial vulnerability. The current list of problems is daunting: rising inflation, slowing growth, foreign exchange pressure, rising fiscal expenditures, increased unemployment, overall debt, and loss of export competitiveness. The IMF expects Turkish GDP to grow only 3 percent in 2015 and 2016. The lira has lost over 10 percent of its value since the beginning of 2015. Moreover, the country is falling behind rival emerging markets.

Even as the Turkish economy sputters, the AKP government is focusing on unsustainable, and sometimes destructive, short-term measures, such as pressuring the central bank to maintain a loose monetary policy, jeopardizing its independence and legitimacy in the process. Meanwhile, the structural reforms needed to ensure the country’s longer-term development are being put off. Among the most fundamental of Turkey’s structural problems is its overreliance on foreign investment. Turkey’s excessive dependence on capital inflows from abroad, as well as its persistently high current account deficit (6 percent of GDP at the end of 2014) has left it deeply vulnerable to external shocks. This weakness also led Morgan Stanley to list Turkey in 2013 as one of the “Fragile Five” emerging countries most at risk of a downturn. The end of the U.S. Federal Reserve’s quantitative easing program — which could come as early as June 2015 — could cause the flow of “hot money” to dry up. Many expect Turkey’s current account deficit to remain in the unsustainable 5 percent territory despite the positive effects of the global drop in oil prices.

The AKP, which has single-handedly ruled the country for over twelve years, has so far shown little interest in ameliorating women’s low participation in the labor market, which is so crucial to the country’s long-term development. Turkey has one of the most rigid labor markets among OECD members, hampering its economic growth. Labor costs remain high compared with Turkey’s BRICS rivals, and low productivity caused by inadequate human capital is constraining growth. President Erdoğan also clashed publicly with Central Bank governor Erdem Başçı on monetary policy decisions, pressuring him to cut interest rates. Over the next few years Istanbul will have the world’s biggest airport, a gargantuan bridge over the Bosporus, and two cities in the greater metropolitan area of one million inhabitants each. Work has now started on an enormous neo-Ottoman mosque that Erdoğan wants to be visible from everywhere in Istanbul, and that will have the tallest minarets in the world. Critics bemoan the haphazard and unplanned
nature of the city’s expansion, inadequate oversight, environmental damage, and mass evictions of the poor to make way for the middle class. The new bridge over the Bosporus could permit the urbanization of a huge stretch of old forest - on which, the city’s fragile ecology depends.

These conflicts have raised significant questions about the quality of Turkey’s economic policymaking at a time when the country desperately needs foreign investment to keep flowing. Turkey’s rankings in corruption prevention and perception indices have slumped. Turkey’s excessive dependence on capital inflows from abroad, as well as its persistently high current account deficit has left it deeply vulnerable to external shocks. Erdoğan’s response to these challenges – besides banning Twitter and YouTube – has been to sidestep criticisms by emphasizing his government’s legitimacy to rule the country. While campaigning for his candidates, Mr Erdoğan has stressed the importance of the national will, reiterating his belief that the primary source of legitimacy for governments is elections. This is also the reason he has opted to turn the polls into a referendum on him and his AK party.

Turkey’s Stalled Democratization Process

Foreign investors and observers are growing increasingly nervous about the increasingly authoritarian nature of President Erdogan and the AKP government. Significant deterioration in crucial indicators such as rule of law, freedom of speech, judicial independence, media freedom, and checks and balances have further shaken the confidence of investors. The desire of the party to institutionalize its power at the expense of actual democratic practices. The idea that it would write a new constitution that would not benefit Turkey, but rather accommodate Erdoğan's aims of becoming an imperial president and a sort of crony capitalism. He has made no secret of his plan to introduce a U.S. style executive presidency in Turkey. But after failing to carry out the required constitutional amendments as prime minister, Erdogan, as president, is forced to establish a modus operandi with the government and its new leadership - at least until he could gain enough support for a constitutional change. His critics believe the country has essentially become a one-party state with a strongman, Erdoğan, at the center of it, since the Justice and Development Party came to power in 2002. That's also a result of very weak opposition parties.

Shaped by the legacy of Kemalism, Turkey had mandated freedom from religion in education and politics. Under the AKP, this model has collapsed, giving way to freedom of religion in education and politics. The way forward for Turkey is to have both: freedom of and from religion in government, politics and education. Turkey's restrictions on the media include the use taxes and imprisonment against journalists and media owners. At least some mass media outlets appear to shy from news that would upset the government. A sharp regression in Turkey’s rule-of-law architecture hampers the EU accession process. Negotiations are stalled as of late 2014 and will stagnate until the Turkish government returns to a higher degree of compliance with the EU’s political criteria for membership. Brussels and Ankara should consider pursuing
an in-depth discussion of judiciary and rule-of-law issues in Turkey. This would entail exempting chapters 23 and 24 of the accession negotiations from the current blockage.

In a democracy, the AKP believes, the will of the majority is determined at the ballot box and then carried out. The idea that the beliefs of liberal minorities should be legally protected and might actually have an influence on policymaking has not been accepted by the government, which claims to speak for the majority. Fearful of antagonizing Turkey’s autocratic president, Erdoğan, media bosses (who have diverse business interests) have begun a cull. Many recall the $2.5 billion fine slapped on the Dogan Group, Turkey’s biggest media conglomerate, in 2009. Its owner, Aydin Doğan, was forced to shrink his empire and dump some critics of Erdoğan before the pressure eased. By some counts scores of journalists have been sacked. A growing number of journalists are resorting to self-censorship to survive. Coverage of alleged corruption scandals linked to the government is a no-go area. But others, writing on non-Kurdish issues, have also been indicted, not least by Erdoğan himself, who has issued writs against several journalists who have made fun of him. Self-censorship is the result. It is directed from the boardroom, as newspaper owners try to avoid the fate suffered by two antigovernment newspapers, Milliyet and Sabah, which lost control of their well-known publications as a result of government pressure. A company run by Erdoğan’s son-in-law bought Sabah at auction - he was the sole bidder. Equally insidious is the widespread use of intimidation to pressure newspapers and their employers. Columnists have lost their jobs as a result of a phone call from the prime minister’s office.

It is true that Erdoğan has done more than any secular rival to tame the generals and accommodate the Kurds. In the bad old days of weak coalition rule, Kurdish journalists were tortured by the dozens or even killed. All the while, a dirty war against Kurdish rebels fostered a sense of beleaguerment that excused human rights abuses. Torture, miscarriages of justice, state-sponsored assassinations - Turkey was a leader in all. Then media bosses would bend before the army. The dirty war lost intensity as Kurds were granted some cultural rights, and Kurdish nationalists, long denied parliamentary representation, became a voluble presence in the Ankara assembly. All the while, the army was being stripped of its political authority. The cases, known as ‘Ergenekon’ and ‘Sledgehammer’, were based on the claim that there was a widespread conspiracy, involving not only the army but also sympathizers in parliament and the media, to destabilize the government and overthrow it in a coup. These cases were held under highly politicized conditions, its fairness compromised by what human rights advocates regard as the misuse of protected and partisan witnesses and the lengthy pretrial detention of many of the accused officers. Erdoğan, after experts scrutinizing the relevant court documents, believes that the conspiracy misled him and used by the Gülenists as a means of destroying the old Kemalist elite – most notably the army - and severing its ties with the AKP. But after twelve years of AKP rule such arguments are wearing thin. The latest target was the Koc Group, a secular-minded conglomerate whose hotel in Taksim Square opened its doors to protesters during the Gezi events. Since then, the Koc Group had to give up a defense contract it had won, and it is being investigated for fraud and plotting against the government. Despite being elected through a
democratic process, the AKP has governed in an authoritarian manner. The party has made a habit of quashing any opposition, most prominently during the 2013 Gezi Park rallies, where police used tear gas and water cannons on protestors. The recent Twitter and YouTube ban is the latest example of the AKP's propensity for curbing basic freedoms.

Though, Erdoğan’s tactics have tarnished his democratic credentials, and most foreign media - particularly in the West - view him as an autocratic leader. Erdoğan’s crackdown on rival religious groups reflects the AKP’s growing authoritarianism and attempts to consolidate power. But for now, in spite of Erdoğan’s confrontational personality and largely unchecked authority, limits enshrined in the current constitution will make it difficult for him to fully dominate the Turkish state. Erdoğan is looking to the June elections to see if his AKP can secure a wide enough victory to overhaul the constitution and move Turkey from a parliamentary to presidential system. If the AKP secures the electoral victories it is hoping for - considering that the rule of law has already greatly eroded within the past year - Erdogan is likely to become an ever-more unquestionable and unaccountable leader.

Erdoğan has done so in ways that subvert the Turkish constitution by taking over powers accorded to the prime ministry without formally amending the constitution. While it is true that the president has the constitutional power to preside over a cabinet meeting if he so chooses, this power is supposed to be reserved for extraordinary situations such as wars or other crises. Yet, Erdoğan has chaired two meetings of the cabinet and purposefully not ruled out doing so again. Erdoğan has assembled a shadow cabinet of advisers around him that in many ways mimic Turkey’s actual cabinet, and he has asserted himself in all sorts of areas that are reserved for the prime minister. In fact, in many ways Erdoğan is primarily motivated by Turkey’s military past and sees his attainment of more and more power as the ultimate victory over the era of military tutelage. The unique history of the relationship between Erdoğan and the military in the pre-AKP era and the relationship between the AKP and the military since 2002 – and particularly since the failed coup by memorandum attempt in 2007 – actually make Turkey’s military past an exacerbating factor rather than a mitigating one. If his party the AKP passes the magic 330 seat threshold in the June election, Erdoğan will attempt to do it by using his parliamentary supermajority to amend the constitution without a referendum.

The AKP’s Split with the Gülen Movement

For Erdoğan’s ruling AK party, an initial decade of relative calm ended with the Gezi protests, which led to a nationwide mobilization against Erdoğan’s polarizing and paternalistic style. More recently the government has faced fresh pressure following a wave of corruption allegations, leaked mostly almost on a daily basis through social media. And since the corruption scandal broke, Erdoğan has upheld in his belief that this is a conspiracy against the Justice and Development Party, and Turkey more generally. He first accused U.S. ambassador Frank Ricciardone for directing this. He's also accused Fethullah Gülen, the leader of the Gülen
Movement. He alleges that the Gülenists have infiltrated critical parts of the Turkish bureaucracy and judiciary, and, as a result, there is what the AKP officials call a ‘parallel state’. Throughout 2014 Erdogan intensified his rhetoric against the Gülenists, accusing the movement of creating a “parallel state” and attempting to foment a coup. Gülenists control many private schools throughout Turkey, as well as the United States, Central Asia, and parts of the Middle East that propagate an Islamist worldview that incorporates theology as well as Western philosophy and science. The AKP and the Gülenists were allies up until not too long ago; they had a confluence of interests in bringing the Turkish military and secular Kemalists to heel. Consequently, when the Turkish military was severely weakened by the so-called Ergenekon or “coup” trials of 2008-13 - which sent hundreds of active and retired military officers as well as other dissidents to prison - disputes between the AKP and Gülen began surfacing.

Since the end of 2012 a tug of war has broken out between the Gülenists and the AKP over the direction of the state and its domestic and foreign policy. What estranged Gülenists from the AKP was first the negotiations with Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned PKK chief, and second its so-called abandonment of the steadfast alliance with the US and Israel. Gülenist schools were often visited by AKP representatives – until they were closed down – as a sign of support and pride for Turkish soft power in the world. Gülen also commands a global lobbying power unrivaled in Turkish politics - a Gülen umbrella assembly group headquartered in Washington, DC has over 200 branches across America. This enormous soft power is now shaping opinion in many Western capitals in favor of regime change in Turkey. These schools serve to promote the Turkish language and culture and were thus integrated in the AKP’s neo-Ottoman vision as the primus inter pares in the Muslim world. The AKP’s assault on Gülenist infrastructure could thus have unpredictable ripple effects across education and politics. A second prong in the claim that the AKP is “Islamizing” Turkey is the highly publicized controversy regarding the government’s alleged expansion of the Imam-Hatip schools, which nominally provide Islamic “vocational education” (mesleki eğitim).

Private schools and hospitals have proliferated and the middle classes prefer to live in the private housing communities that have sprung up in Istanbul and elsewhere. An injection of pious women into the civil service will advance the AKP’s plan to make the state more religious. Erdoğan is Turkey’s most powerful leader since Atatürk, but the fallout with Gülen has been a serious challenge to him, and its effects will continue to be felt. By picking fights with those who disagree with him and encouraging sectarianism, he is condemning his country to a period of turbulence, while undermining his own reputation as a path-finding democrat in the Muslim world. Erdogan described the influential Hizmet network of Gulen, who lives in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania, in a speech as a terrorist organization. He has shut down Gülen's network of cramming schools, a major source of income and influence for Hizmet. He has purged the police and judiciary of Gülenists and blocked a bid by Gülen to extend his influence into the intelligence service, MIT. Gülen directs influence in the police and judiciary to bring generals to trial which Erdogan says amounts to a parallel state.
Neo-Ottomanism

The support granted by Erdoğan to Islamist governments in Arab Spring countries is not necessarily derived from supposed ideological connections stemming from “political Islam” as much as it comes from Turkey’s economic aspirations in the Arab world. And the AKP has this economic vision of a Muslim solidarity and Muslim parties and the rise of Muslim parties in the region. Even the widely touted neo-Ottoman turn driving Turkish foreign policy brought by the AKP has proved, in the end, illusory losing the Arab markets because of its unconditional support for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and thus angering its financiers in the region. In accordance with the ‘neo-Ottomanism’ of the late 20th century Islamists advocate ‘Turkish Exceptionalism’, the uniqueness of Turkey: in this sense, Turkey is determined to expand democracy as a role model in former Ottoman territories. Nevertheless, ‘neo-Ottomanism’ also is used to legitimize imperialist practices in Syria and Iraq by the AKP administration. Contrary to their power politics, Turkish officials like Erdoğan and Davutoğlu underline Muslim unity against the rest of the world, especially the west, asserting that the Pax Ottomanica means a multilateral reorientation und egalitarian partnership in the Muslim world but Turks omit that these ‘allies’ should unconditionally accept as in the days of the Ottoman Empire Turkish hegemony and leadership.

Tarik Oguzlu, a scholar on Turkish foreign policy, describes in a policy paper of Antalya International University’s think tank SEPAM the AKP’s “precious loneliness” giving following examples: “Turkey’s voting against the US-sponsored UNSC resolution in 2010 putting sanctions on Iran, the deterioration of its relations with Israel in the aftermath of the Davos crisis in January 2009 and the so-called Mavi Marmara raid in May 2010, Turkey’s adoption of an ambiguous and critical attitude towards the European Union, Turkey’s continuing support to Hamas despite the latter’s regional isolation in the post-Mursi Middle East, Turkey’s equivocal stance during Kobane crisis, and Turkey’s never-ending openings to Asia and Africa are considered by many to have been the footprints of non-westernization of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey’s stance in the ongoing nuclear standoff between the West and Iran and Ankara’s improving relations with the rising powers of the non-western world, notably China and Brazil, have also caused strong anxieties to surface across western capitals. (…) Their rush to recognize the Sisi regime in Egypt as legitimate, their reluctance to get involved in the Syrian crisis against the Assad regime and their predisposition to outsource the task of defeating the ISIS threat to regional countries have led Turkish rulers to harshly criticize western countries on moral grounds.”

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4 Tarik Oguzlu, Turkey and the West. SEPAM Policy Brief No. 14, February 2015.
Drawing on the great diversity in the languages, faiths, traditions, cultural practices and identities neo-Ottomanists offer an alternative that were represented in the multicultural fabric of Ottoman society. Current debate surrounding the issue of neo-Ottomanism and the challenges that it presents has brought to the fore the need to re-examine the question of what constitutes an integrated and successful multicultural society. Neo-Ottomanists share the belief in 'Turkish Exceptionalism', that Turkey is morally superior to other nations. Such 'religious idealism' aims to revive the Pax Ottomanica and constitutes an old phenomenon in Turkish foreign policy. Turgut Özal was the first to allude to exceptionalism. The Islamists are said to mask imperial ambitions with religious motives since they declared in their Strategic Depth-Doctrine the former Ottoman territories to the sole domain of Turkey and expanded it even to Central Asia. Turkey portrays herself as protector and defender of freedom, religion and human dignity against tyrants and terrorists in the Muslim world. Traditionally, Turkey represents a role model of liberal ideals according to Davutoğlu. For him, Islamic values have universal importance and their global promotion and recognition are in Turkey’s national interest. In a time of great political change in Turkey -- the end of military tutelage and the ascendance of political Islam over Kemalist secularism -- how far from the North Atlantic political consensus can Turkey move without affecting its security role within NATO? The preliminary decision taken by Turkey last year to select the Chinese missile defense system caused much speculation in Western capitals about whether this development marked a definitive change in Turkey's strategic identity. Nonetheless, Turkey would enjoy far-reaching freedom of action only from the perspective of political realism, when Ankara avoids restrictive alliances and international law. Consequently, the AKP has veered away with its pro-Islamist foreign policy from its erst-while allies in the questions of Iran sanctions and the accusal of Israel before the UN Security Council because of the Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara - a Turkish vessel causing the death of 11 Turkish activists - but also the unreserved support for terror organizations Hamas in Palestine and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria.

**Turkey, the US, Israel and the Iran Nuclear Dossier**

There are also geostrategic considerations in Ankara calling on the United States not to acquiesce and fall for Iran's aims in Syria. Teaming up to fight ISIS will not create a rosy rapprochement between the two countries, the US neoconservatives strongly criticize the US-Iranian negotiations claiming that the Iranian leadership has hegemonic and imperialistic aims to export its revolutionary ideology. An unusual alliance between the neocons and the AKP brings forward allegations that such appeasement could run counter not only to the interests of American allies in the region, but would also likely lead to a cold-war like situation between Iran and the United States, especially if Iran acquires nuclear weapons. "Iran is trying to dominate the region," Erdoğan said in a press conference on March 26, 2015. "Could this be allowed? This has begun annoying us, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. This is really not tolerable and Iran has to see this." Turkey supports the Saudi-led military operation against Houthi rebels in Yemen.
and called on the militia group and its "foreign supporters" in Tehran to abandon acts which threaten peace and security in the region.

Friends of the US-Turkey relationship shouldn't let their leaders mislead policies because of over-confidence. If they do, they may inadvertently steer a precious alliance right off the cliff. Erdoğan may have broken lots of diplomatic china in his unseemly partnership with Obama's domestic political adversaries, the neocons. As he asks US officials shouldn't the context - Iran's appetite for regional domination through terror and intimidation in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and the Persian Gulf - have an impact on the negotiations. Disregarding Iranian and Hezbollah terrorism, and the role of Iranian-led Shiite militias in the fight against the Islamic State aim to raising the prospect of direct talks about the future of Syria with Iran's local ally Assad and seem more like elements of a concerted plan to win over Iran's "supreme leader," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Any AKP official – Erdoğan not surprisingly criticized John Kerry - would be appalled at what appears to be Washington's eagerness for a nuclear accord. The US administration should talk to the AKP administration about how important the bilateral relationship is to its deterrent posture in the region and find a way to work constructively with Ankara. If the US President makes the wrong choice, both Turkey and the Arab states will draw their own conclusions. What Turkey wants to prevent is a worst-case scenario where Israel someday takes direct measures against Iran that blow apart a deal negotiated by an American President. That is why the US-Turkey relationship will truly be in uncharted waters since differences over how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute are the most emotive. Erdoğan and Davutoğlu demand a new US policy endorsing a UN Security Council resolution that would, against the wishes of Israel's democratically elected government, define terms of a final settlement.

For Washington, such an act would leave a dangerous legacy of having ended 40 years of principled US effort to promote direct negotiations between the parties. Nevertheless, Obama told the Huffington Post on March 20, 2015 that he took Benyamin Netanyahu "at his word" that a Palestinian state will not happen during his tenure, and that Washington needed to evaluate all options to avoid chaos. Based on the European and Jordanian initiatives at the Security Council in December 2014, a resolution would call for two capitals in Jerusalem, a territorial solution based on the 1967 lines and territorial exchanges, and recognition of Israel as a Jewish nation-state. In any case, Netanyahu would likely declare his opposition to an imposed solution, especially on Jerusalem. This would open the door to future sanctions against Israel in the event of noncompliance. His best chance of avoiding a collision with Washington over a Security Council resolution would be to announce a new policy on settlements - namely, that Israel will not build further settlements on the Palestinian West Bank.

If the US does not demonstrate a willingness to address concerns about the Mideast peace process, and if Netanyahu does not publicly declare a settlement policy that backs up his commitment to a two-state solution, a full-blown diplomatic collision with Turkey – there are no ambassadors between both countries - will likely result. Even though Prime Minister Netanyahu apologized for the Mavi Marmari raid, Turkey insists on Israeli compensation for the victims of
the Gaza flotilla. In addition, 2015 is the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. So in a very Machiavellian way the Turks may want to rebuild the relationship with the Jewish lobby that may weigh on the US officials in order to to fend off a resolution recognizing Armenian demands in Congress on the 100th anniversary. Hence, the AKP parts ways with the neocons on the Palestinian issue who form a strong advocacy front for Israel’s righteousness but also for the first-strike argument against Iran’s nuclear programs which brings them again at loggerheads with Ankara. Turkey and Brazil mediated previous negotiations over Iran's disputed nuclear program in 2010. "When we look at the positions (of the) P5+1 right now, Iran is still below the line we were able to bring in 2010, but we hope Iran will come to that line," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Turkish TV. In the end, his colleague, the Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek, underlined his hope that the deal could pave the way for the lifting of economic sanctions on Iran, and might help boost Turkey's exports to its neighbor and help bring down global oil prices. Diplomats say Erdoğan’s face-off with Tehran and Damascus in the Syrian conflict, which shook Turkish financial markets, has revived doubts about his political judgment and his neo-Ottoman intentions.

End of the Role Model?

Turkey no longer presents a role model for the shape other new democracies in the Near East will take. A Turkey dominated by domestic polarization may not necessarily contribute to the stabilization of the turmoil in the Near East. Turkey’s role as a barrier against the disorder on its borders and a reliable partner for the West may become more questionable. Turkey’s ability to serve as a bastion of stability in the Greater Middle East seems to be diminished. By the same token, Turkey’s status as an island of stability in a fragile region is no longer accurate. In this regard, critics view this as a cause for serious concern, especially in view of the lack of alternatives. Indeed, on critical regional issues, Turkey and its allies have often worked at cross-purposes. Remedying this will require a steady effort to rebuild trust and communication and to find common policy ground on which Ankara and its allies can cooperate. There is little hope of Turkey returning to normalcy and accountability anytime soon. In addition to the bans on Twitter and YouTube, Parliament passed a new law granting the government broad authority to censor the Internet, generating heated criticism from abroad, particularly from the European Union and the United States. The European Parliament reacted by passing a resolution condemning the blatant departure from the Copenhagen criteria by Turkey in the middle of accession negotiations. Erdoğan’s electoral victory is unlikely to lead to more moderation on these hot topics; restoring Turkey’s social harmony at home and image abroad stays the major challenge. Erdoğan has disparaged his political adversaries as traitors, terrorists and an alliance of evil. Estranging Alevi, secularist opposition politicians, journalists, and judges for the sake of a comfortable lead in these or in coming elections does not bode well for
the country’s harmony. This kind of response, especially in an electoral context, shows how far Erdogan has departed from democratic principles that allow dissent.

The AKP leader seems eager to seek revenge against opponents, even suggesting that the allegedly Gulenist-led inquiry is the work of foreign conspirators. For outside observers, Turkey now looks like a badly shaken democracy - in a climate that almost certainly guarantees more dangerous political polarization and instability in Turkey. Not unexpectedly, big demonstrations followed, which call for explanations, recounts, and greater accountability on the part of the political leadership. This turn of events has presented the EU with the dilemma regarding how to keep Turkey anchored in Europe while Turkey continues to flaunt the most elementary rules that EU aspirants are expected to follow. The EU will have to demand more strongly that the Turkish government respect the values of liberal democracy, ranging from freedom of expression to the rule of law and respect for human rights.

With the Prime Minister’s aggressive campaign rhetoric, Ankara’s relations with the West cannot be expected to improve. To revive Turkey’s stalled EU membership bid, the European partners should urge Turkish leaders to follow through with their commitment to writing a new constitution that better protects minority rights and basic freedoms and clearly defines the relationship between military and civilian authorities. Kurds and Alevi citizens must exercise increased control over politics through cultural and municipal decentralization. In doing so, Erdogan may revive the peace process to address the domestic and regional challenges that the Kurdish question poses and secure Kurdish votes against his political rivals in the upcoming elections. In quid pro quo, the pro-Kurdish party HDP will be supported to implement its program of democratic autonomy in the localities that it commands. Kurds rightly expect that it is time for Erdogan to keep his promises and to grant them what they have been waiting for decades, their political and cultural rights. In contrast, if civil liberties and minority rights are not guaranteed, the courts and media lose their independence, and rule of law is violated, Erdogan's own political strategy will jeopardize his vision for Turkey's future. To reassure western allies of his democratic credentials, Erdogan needs to undo the unconstitutional bans on social media due to illegal wiretapping leading to the executive’s breaches of the rule of law and freedom of expression.

Meanwhile, the idea of a "Turkish model" for the Middle East has butted up against stark demonstrations of the limits of Ankara's power in the region, with many policy initiatives not working out as planned. Moreover, Turkey's recent political turmoil has not only limited its ability to play a larger role in the region, it has also detracted from the EU-Turkish relationship and Brussels’ ability to objectively understand ongoing political developments in Ankara. The strategic environment has shown Turkey's political elites that they must balance their country's identity and maintain strong ties with the EU, the U.S., and NATO if they hope to take a leading role in managing the Syrian war's regional fallout. It will also require more determined action to advance the interests that Turkey and its partners share but also more decisive steps to address
the conflicts and problems roiling the region. Allies can bring capabilities, insights, and funding to the table in ways that can reinforce Turkey's own efforts.

Such a course of action would revitalize Turkey’s democratic transition and credentials as a model capable of reconciling Western liberal values with a religiously conservative society. Indeed, such a Turkey would regain its constructive role in its neighborhood and also energize its relationship with the EU. Yet, if the current course of action is maintained, it may well drag Turkey into turmoil and the kind of instability and polarization that could cause Turkey to look more like the post-Arab Spring Middle East rather than an inspiration for pluralist democracy, consensus building and tolerance. In recent years, there was hope that Turkey could help by serving as a model of a successful economy and well-functioning democracy; but recent events have raised doubts. He attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) to “ban twitter,” journalists are increasingly being censored, civilian protests have been stymied through police force, attempts have been made to suppress the Army - considered the bulwark of secularism - and the government is slowly trying to gain control over the judiciary.

The infamous “zero problems with neighbors” policy of Ahmet Davutoğlu, is increasingly called “zero neighbors without problems” by analysts. Turkey’s policies in the Middle East have essentially failed and it has squandered much of its credibility as an effective regional actor. History will prove that this reversal in Turkish foreign policy backfired and harmed its self-proclaimed status as sole Muslim democracy leading by its example other Islamic nations on their paths to prosperity and peace. And thus in view of Turkey’s domestic troubles and regional developments, there is low expectation for Turkey to reassess the direction of its foreign policy and seek new avenues for cooperation with the United States and Europe. Turkey’s political turmoil appears to have added to western frustrations with Ankara’s international behavior. In fact, Turkey must overcome sources of internal tension if it is to continue to thrive economically, consolidate its democracy, and act as a compelling example to others. The EU accession bid is an important counterweight to Turkey's interests in cooperating with its European partners on the democracy dossier instead of a military engagement in the Syrian civil war. Here the situation is more advantageous to the EU and Turkey, but only if they think in "twenty-first-century" terms rather than realpolitik terms.

Conclusion

When policy makers as awarding authority aim at the publicity of decision-making processes for overcoming political deadlocks, think tanks come into play to put adversaries and persons in charge under pressure to give their consent to policy proposals. The foundation and cooperation of international institutions compose an important but also a problematic path, which Turkey took under Davutoğlu until the outbreak of the Arab Spring, to solve the tensions between religious and cooperative aspects of its foreign policy. From the beginning of the AKP government, the think tank scholars have actively been involved in research institutes which has
great importance in their relations to the power centre at Ankara. Think tank scholars have constantly participated in conferences and briefings that were often broadcast on TV. In doing so, they discussed political issues with politicians, journalists and businessmen; this turned the academics in “public intellectuals”. For expanding their influence on the power brokers the scholars had to capture and maintain the support of the research institutes.

Policy entrepreneurs pursue networking in order to capture political agendas thereby knowledge becomes politicised by think tanks. The Islamists and the libertarians are often competing for influence in the AKP. The book thus explores the question how policy-planning organisations reshaped the foreign policy agendas in a time of political transformation and regional crises after the Arab Spring. The informal links to politicians enable scholars to promote ideas and mould public opinion. Networks are conceived as a source of innovation where intellectual authority can be used to support policy decisions. Using networking theories I illustrate that conservative think tanks played the role of policy entrepreneurs to devise the new unilateralism in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's domestic political sentiment, trade patterns, and geostrategic thinking are undergoing a profound change - and this does portend fundamental shifts in Turkey's relationship with the West in coming decades.

Since conservative think tanks employ mostly scholars with identical ideological views. Therefore, these institutes eased the AKP’s perception as a distinct political movement and promoted their image as public intellectuals. SETA contributed to the acceptance of Davutoğlu's ideas and reinforced the connection between the intellectuals and the political elites. Erdoğan felt able to voice a different kind of aspiration: to regional leadership and a level of prestige that Turks had not enjoyed since the Ottoman heyday. Given the AKP’s unrivalled position domestically, its foreign-policy doctrine of Strategic Depth has become hegemonic within the country. Before the AKP, the Turks thought of themselves as a European country situated next to the Middle East. Toward the end of the last decade, Ankara decided that the path to greater power and influence was through the Middle East rather than Europe. With the exception of the Iraqi Kurds, Turkey currently has no allies in the Middle East. Nonetheless, the AKP cannot ignore public opinion on critical foreign-policy questions as easily as the military rulers who previously dominated Turkish foreign-policy decision making could. Finally, Turkish officials are now being held accountable for their foreign-policy decisions, and at times give in to the populism of nationalist segments as well as to the power of business interests.

In Turkey’s case, the challenges are to increase firm productivity and education quality, and to strengthen public institutions. MENA countries need to shift accountability in public services to students, patients, and citizens; replace energy subsidies with targeted cash transfers; and promote competition in domestic markets. In a less forgiving global economic context, the risk of the “middle income trap” looms for countries that let off on the reform efforts. Improvements in the rule of law, in public accountability and transparency, and in the climate for entrepreneurship and innovation will thus be needed for Turkey to complete the transition to a high income economy. Economic growth has come down to a modest 3-4 percent range from
well over 5 percent during 2002-2011, and risks related to the country’s large external financing needs have not been banished. Critics have raised questions over the strength of Turkey’s legal and economic institutions, and economists are concerned that Turkey may remain “trapped” in its current middle income status. Its policy framework needs to adjust the pro-market and pro-European orientation adopted in the aftermath of Turkey’s crisis in the early 2000s. The response to the major financial crisis in 2001 led to a regime shift and a subsequent era of rapid economic and social advancement, which today faces a new test of deepening reforms to ease the country’s path to high income.

Turkey’s economic catch-up with Europe over the past decade mirrors the experience of other accession countries. Turkey has harmonized many of its laws and regulations with EU standards and dramatically expanded access to public services, but concerns over economic and public sector governance persist. Many outside observers illustrate, these contrasts resulting from uneven progress along various dimensions of its economic and social development. Trade liberalization in the 1980s under Özal, followed by the Customs Union agreement with the EU in 1995, provided the price signals and competitive incentives for the modernization of Turkey’s industry. After 2001, banking sector restructuring allowed financing to flow to the business sector, and, together with more business friendly regulations, facilitated the creation of jobs in manufacturing and services. Public and private investments in infrastructure, in particular transport and logistics, ensured that the benefits of international integration were spread inland. Because of the flow of cheap money to Turkey in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis, Turkey’s underlying competitiveness challenges have not been addressed. A renewed policy consensus in favor of competitive markets, political and civil liberties and improved economic governance would help Turkey consolidate its institutions and thereby lay the foundation further improvements in the quality of public services to counter the fiscal windfall from declining interest payments. A new growth model is needed based on increases in firm-level productivity, as the gains from structural change peter out.

High tech products remain underrepresented in its export basket. Simpler, more predictable and better enforced regulations and investments in skills would help Turkey attract more FDI and upgrade the quality of its exports. However, Turkey’s experiment with unorthodox monetary policy has not prevented sharp credit cycles and pressures on the currency and domestic prices as global investor appetite has waxed and waned. One lesson is clear: monetary policy alone is no cure for fundamental savings-investment imbalances. To address these, fiscal policy and above all structural reforms are needed. To do so successfully, however, Turkey will also need to follow macro-economic, financial and social security policies that encourage Turkish households to save; and it will need to continue to nurture the trust in Turkey’s financial system and protect the independence of its regulatory institutions – the Central Bank (CBRT), the Capital Markets Board (CMB) and BRSA.

In Political Economy, the Neo-Marxist approach however stresses the monopolistic rather than the competitive nature of capitalism. Driven by state capitalism Anatolian entrepreneurs
have become important actors in Turkish politics under the AKP administration. Rapid urbanization, including in the secondary cities of Anatolia, created an attractive production base for investors and an economically efficient class of ‘Anatolian Tigers’ - a new generation of Muslim entrepreneurs from its inland provinces – emerged and led to a political constituency for conservative social and liberal economic policies. Furthermore, seeking domestic and foreign policies that were conducive to their business interests, the AKP mobilized politically the Anatolian tigers, forming the highly influential Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (MÜSİAD), which comprised Islamic businesses. These Anatolian companies have become strong advocates for further Turkish expansion into emerging Middle Eastern, rather than European, markets. Consequently, the economic interests of these groups have played an important role in the AKP’s efforts to promote greater trade and economic cooperation with the Middle East in the context of Turkey’s new foreign-policy agenda. All the while, the AKP’s friends in the private sector - pious businessmen from the interior of the country who bankrolled his election victories - were rewarded with contracts for building, improving infrastructure, and producing energy. Turkey gained a new elite, both brassy and devout. But what is abundantly clear is this: by keeping secularists at bay and riding on his popularity in Turkey’s heartland, Erdoğan is trying his best to shake off Atatürk’s long shadow.

When the AKP came to power it brought a new direction, a new set of principles and a new strategy to Turkish foreign policy. Some scholars ascribed this reorientation to the rise of neo-Ottomanism, others called it the Islamization, and yet others argued of a Middle Easternization of Turkish foreign policy. All labels have in common that they give weight to Islam and Turkey’s imperial past as soft power assets in the conduct of foreign policy by rejecting secular Kemalism in Turkish diplomacy. The AKP capitalized on the neo-Ottomanist foreign policy of the Özal era and the multi-dimensional foreign policy of Erbakan by using Turkey’s pivotal role to transform the country due to its geopolitical location into a global actor.

Unexpected events, like the Arab Spring faced Davutoğlu’s grand vision with questions that it had not always foreseen. Although Davutoğlu certainly helped to give Turkish foreign policy an international standing, it can be said that the AKP leadership did not stick strictly to its own declared aim of “zero problems with neighbors”. This reflected both the internal balance of power between the AKP government and the Kemalist establishment, and hard external realities of the Arab Spring. Soner Çağaptay even argued that “neo-Ottomanism” was a “misnomer” since the AKP “ignores Israel, the Balkans and the Caucasus”. In Davuotğlu’s strategic depth doctrine Turkey plays the role of a “bridge” to regions adjacent: the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Middle East. This new direction of Turkish foreign policy denies the Kemalist notion that Turkey should abstain from any grand design in its foreign policy and instead dedicate its ambition to the process of Westernization. Furthermore, this doctrine places less value on nationalism but more on the transnational vision of Muslim community (ummah). Thus, the AKP leadership has formulated a reorientation from the dependency on the west by balancing its
relationships through rapprochement to its neighboring states seeking “zero problems with neighbors”.

The new foreign policy activism has overburdened Ankara’s diplomacy while re-Islamization of its foreign relations to the Muslim world (Hamas, al Nusra and the Muslim Brotherhood) has caused the alienation of the west and led to serious concerns and doubts about its reliability as western ally in a region in uproar. During the Syrian Civil War its failure to return to the western camp showed its vulnerability to sectarian polarization in the Middle East and its weakness to counterbalance the emergence of Iran in the Levante, the Persian Gulf and Iraq without western protection. In the end, the AKP revised its own foreign policy strategy and replaced soft power argumentation with hard power threats to almost all its Muslim neighbors: Hakan Fidan, Turkey’s spy chief, and Ahmet Davutoglu, foreign minister, appear to discuss how to establish grounds for a military intervention in Syria.

Furthermore Turkey’s relations to the Arab monarchies have been hurt due to Ankara’s support for ousted President Morsi in Egypt and his Muslim Brotherhood. This has led to a growing sense of isolation from its Muslim neighbors and has caused Ankara to reorient its foreign policy to the United States and the European Union. Ankara has once again turned to the west, seemingly considering Washington and Brussels as indispensable allies in containing Iran’s regional influence and protecting itself from the instability in Iraq and Syria. Thus, the regional setting of the post-Arab Spring has upset Turkish ambitions.

On Egypt, Syria and missile defense, the Turkish prime minister’s most recent actions have been at odds with the views of his Western allies, if not with the country’s own commitments. As a result, Turkey may remain isolated in its own region. In a cavalier attitude Erdoğan seems to assume that Turkey does not need the West. Consequently Turkey favors Chinese missile defense systems over western arms. Furthermore Erdoğan asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to help Turkey become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. These two statements raised serious questions on Turkey’s actual standing in the transatlantic security partnership.

Against this backdrop, foreign investors are staying away from Turkey - causing the lira and the Istanbul-stock exchange to plummet. In this regard, the EU should continue to temper Ankara’s sometimes nationalist and populist policies in favor of economic cooperation. On its part, the west as a whole needs a new, more comprehensive framework to coordinate and implement policies jointly with Ankara. The arena in which a more proactive policy is most urgently required - and would go the furthest to reassure allies and deter Iran - is Syria. On the one hand, three years of turmoil in the Arab world should counsel smart, economical, and effective multilateral action, not serve as excuse for western inaction; on the other hand, Erdoğan should consider the impact that his decisions had on U.S. and European interests in the region. In the end, Turkey need not act alone and certainly should not unilaterally resort to military aid to extremist Syrian rebels.
Erdoğan’s government has taken positions, especially vis-à-vis Israel and in Syria (where it has given free passage to jihadist groups), that have eroded European trust in Ankara. Weighing all factors, the EU could cope with Turkey given the unfavorable military and diplomatic correlation of forces in the Syrian crisis, but doing so would require determination and a more realistic approach to power in facing the unpredictable Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The Turks may believe that international condemnation of Syria's war crimes would deny Assad a diplomatic victory, keep tensions high, and confirm the widespread fear that the Geneva talks will be the high water mark of negotiations.

While Brussels is convinced that the Turks would not go through with a war threat or, if they did, would not succeed in derailing the international effort. But if one believes that Ankara would act, then the EU will have to weigh the strategic costs and benefits of a strong position on Turkey versus the Geneva talks. Emphasizing these interests is logical, but this same logic led the West to conclude that Erdoğan would not hang tough on supporting the Syrian rebels or forcibly change Syrian borders. But if the EU tries to deflect Erdoğan's mischief by going tough on Syria, he will just be encouraged to go rogue in the conflict. Accordingly, the European Union should build an alternative international consensus to support its diplomacy in the absence of peace-brokering, exploiting the fact that Erdoğan has made himself increasingly vulnerable by violating global norms. Finally, Brussels should use its leverage on Ankara in a manner supportive of Turkish security, and make clear that if a cooperative diplomatic alternative is rendered impossible by Turkish meddling it will stop the accession negotiations. Instead of expressing indignation Ankara should focus on crisis management in accordance with the long-term interests of its alliance with the west. The AKP leaders should navigate carefully: the administration needs to continue working cooperatively with the Europeans.