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Turkish Foreign Policy in the Era of Global Turmoil

E. Fuat Keyman



ABSTRACT

Turkey's rapid transition from a buffer state position to a pro-active and multi-dimensional diplomatic activism has led to ambiguities on the aim, intention and realism of the recent Turkish foreign policy. These ambiguities have turned into increased skepticism in certain parts of the western audience about the direction of Turkey. This essay contends that there are three forms of these skepticisms, two of which either are unable and inadequate to comprehend the new dynamics of Turkish foreign policy or don't offer fair criteria to judge Turkish foreign policy. Instead, it offers three objective criteria, namely the environment, capacity and strategy, to examine both viability of the new pro-activism and its potential direction. Further, the study suggests that the sustainability of this multi-dimensional and constructive foreign policy activism requires Turkey to have European Union anchor as the main axis of its foreign policy and a consolidated democracy.



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TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL TURMOIL

E. Fuat Keyman*

In his influential work, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, published in 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski suggests that:

Gravely increasing the instability of the Eurasian Balkans and making the situation potentially much more explosive is the fact that two of the adjoining major nation-states, each with a historically imperial, cultural, religious, and economic interest in the region- namely, Turkey and Iran- are themselves volatile in their geopolitical orientation and are internally potentially vulnerable. Were these two states to become destabilized, it is quite likely that the entire region would be plunged into massive disorder, with the ongoing ethnic and territorial conflicts spinning out of control and the region's already delicate balance of power severely disrupted. Accordingly, Turkey and Iran are not only important geostrategic players but are also geopolitical pivots, whose own internal condition is of critical importance to the fate of the region. Both are middle-sized powers, with strong regional aspirations and a sense of their historical significance.¹

Since Brzezinski penned this description of Turkey in 1997, there has occurred a set of significant changes both globally and in Turkey, giving rise to radical transformations in our globalizing world, generating important impacts on Turkish foreign policy. Yet, Brzezinski's diagnostic statement about Turkey, emphasizing both its regional power identity, and the importance of domestic stability for the sustainability of this role, has remained true. Turkey's "geopolitical pivot" and "regional power" role in world politics has become even more important in recent years. Turkey has been expected to initiate a proactive, multi-dimensional and constructive foreign policy in many areas, ranging

* E. FUAT KEYMAN is professor of International Relations at Koç University/Istanbul. He is also the director of the Koç University Center for Research on Globalization and Democratic Governance (GLODEM), fkeyman@ku.edu.tr
1. Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997. Pp: 124-35.

Geopolitics,
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identity.

from contributing to peace and stability in the Middle East, to playing an active role in countering “terrorism” and extremism, from becoming a new “energy hub” to acting as one of the architects of “the inter-civilization dialogue initiative” aiming at producing a vision of the world, based on dialogue, tolerance and living together. Thus, there has been an upsurge of interest in, and a global attraction to, Turkey and its contemporary history. Moreover, the global attraction to Turkey has stemmed not only from the geopolitical identity of Turkey, as a strong state with the capacity to function as a “geopolitical security hinge” in the intersection of the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasian regions, but also from its cultural identity as a modern national formation with parliamentary democratic governance, secular constitutional structure and mainly Muslim population.²

Moreover, the end of the Cold War led to the end of Turkey’s “buffer state geopolitical position” setting in motion the increasing proactivism of Turkish foreign policy because it has also been in search of a new identity. As recent global transformations have been requiring a much more active, multi-dimensional and constructive foreign policy behavior from Turkey, as the Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu has pointed out correctly, the “strategic depth” of this new policy has necessitated the employment of not only geopolitics but also identity and economy.³ Thus, geopolitics, modernity and democracy have become the constitutive dimensions of a proactive Turkish foreign policy identity. This identity has involved the increasing role and visibility of “soft power” in Turkish foreign policy, which is a successful complement to its historical “hard power” stemming from its military and geopolitical capabilities. The “strategic depth” as well as the ability to enlarge the sphere of influence have required both soft power and hard power; the incorporation into the process of foreign policy making of both security and modernity (defined in terms of democracy, economy, and cultural identity) as its significant sources.⁴ Surely, the soft power quality of Turkish foreign policy has derived from Turkey’s interesting and important journey in modernity, despite its continuing deficits in making itself multicultural, democratic and pluralistic; from its political commitment to democracy, despite its deficit in making itself consolidated and deepened; from its economic dynamism, despite its deficit in making itself an economy which is sustainable in terms of its success in human-development; and from proactive, problem-solving and dialogue-based good neighborhood diplomacy, despite its deficit in making itself also realistic and effective.

2. For a more detail about the recent Turkish foreign policy activities, see L.G. Martin and D.Keridis (eds), *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, MIT, Cambridge, 2004.

3. A. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth), Küre, İstanbul, 2001.

4. The concept of soft power refers to a co-optive, non-coercive and consent-based power, rather than a command-based, coercive and hard power. State power gains legitimacy in the eyes of others through its soft power whose sources include diplomacy, economy, culture, identity. Through soft power, the state gets the other state to “want what it wants”. Soft power involves consent. For detail, see J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs Books, and New York, 2004. For an important account of the role of soft power in Turkish foreign policy, see Insight Turkey, special issue, *Turkey’s Rising Soft Power*, vol.10, no.2, 2008.

All of these qualities of the recent Turkish foreign policy have paved the way to an upsurge of interest in, and increasing global attraction to Turkey and its modern history, which has demonstrated that secular democratic constitutional governance is possible in a social setting with an almost exclusively Muslim population. They have also resulted in the widening and deepening, in a global scale, of the perception of Turkey as a key and pivotal actor whose regional power status involves strong soft power capabilities in addition to its traditional geopolitical importance. As has been pointed out by many foreign policy analysts, there is no doubt that, today, Turkey is a regional power and a pivotal actor in global politics, with its geostrategic importance, its modernity, its democracy, and its economy, all of which have constituted the political and discursive basis of the proactive, multi-dimensional and constructive identity of Turkish foreign policy.⁵ As Lenore Martin has suggested in her introduction to *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, "The tectonic forces that reshaped international relations at the end of the twentieth century –the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and Eurasia, the growing stridency of Islamic fundamentalism, globalization of national economies, and increasing demands for democratization and civil society- also thrust Turkey into an increasingly pivotal role on the geopolitical stage. The aftershocks at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the events of September 11, 2001, the global spread of anti-Western terrorism, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the cracking of consensus in NATO and the UN threw up additional challenges for Turkey that have confirmed and complicated its critical role."⁶ Similarly, Graham Fuller, in his recent study entitled *The New Turkish Republic*, defines Turkey as a pivotal state in the Muslim world and argues that with its proactive foreign policy drawing global attention and attraction Turkey is becoming a regional power in the post-September/11 world.⁷

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Three Forms of Skepticism

It should be noted, however, that Turkey's new foreign policy identity has been beset by skepticism, contradictions, and even tensions. The more Turkey has become globally and regionally active, initiating energetic and confident diplomacy, engaging what is called, "zero-conflicts and problems with neighbors;" widening the sphere of its foreign policy activities toward Asia, Africa, and Latin America; increasing its willingness to confront its historical and deep foreign policy problems, especially with Cyprus, Armenia, Northern Iraq; and offering a mediatory role in conflict resolution talks between Iraq and Syria, Israel and Syria, and now Iran and the Western world,

5. See L.G. Martin, "Introduction", in L.G. Martin and D.Keridis (eds), *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*

6. Ibid, p.3.

7. G.E. Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, United State Institute of Peace Press, Washington, 2007.

The new Turkish foreign policy has been operating in accordance with the attempts to create an effective global governance in an era of risk, turbulence, and uncertainty.

and the more Turkey has initiated such multidimensional foreign policy behavior as “a de-centered and independent proactivism without a firm western anchor,” there has occurred, especially in certain segments in the West, an increased skepticism about the aim, intention and realism of the recent Turkish foreign policy.⁸ In fact, as Turkish foreign policy’s diplomatic activism has increased rapidly and drastically in the Middle East, especially in terms of its engagement with Iran and Syria, and as this activism has involved a strong and recursive critique of the military intervention of Israel in Gaza, skepticism too has increased. Skepticism reigns over the intention and direction of Turkish foreign policy. I suggest that such skepticism should be taken seriously and discussed thoroughly. A quick glance at various articulations of skepticism in the recent academic and public debate about proactive and multidimensional Turkish foreign policy reveals three contrasting positions, on which I will focus in what follows.⁹

There is a “thick skepticism with a strong ideological take” on the new Turkish foreign policy behavior, and it is perceived as a means by which the AK Party government attempts to widen and deepen the legitimacy and power of its Islamic-authoritarian governance in Turkey. For instance, Gareth Jenkins suggests in his recent work on Turkey that the AK party government constitutes a form of political Islam, while apparently running West, aims in fact to head East, and in doing so, employs an authoritarian and conservative governance, which has increased fear, insecurity, and social polarization in Turkey.¹⁰ Similarly, Soner Çağaptay charges the AK Party as an “Islamist party,” viewing “the world as composed of religious blocks,” and working on “anti-Western, anti-US and anti-Israeli initiatives.” And, “instead of looking after the interests of the Euro-Atlantic community, Turkey is looking after the interests of the ‘Muslim world.’”¹¹ The most extreme version of strong skepticism has been penned by Daniel Pipes, who, in his recent newspaper article, did not hesitate to establish a link between Iran’s President, the leader of a terrorist organization, and the Prime Minister of Turkey, and suggested that the AK Party in Turkey is “more dangerous than Shari’a:” “If the violence of Islamism 1.0 rarely succeeds in forwarding the Shari’a, the Islamism 2.0 strategy of working through the system does better. Islamists, adept at winning public opinion, represent the main opposition force in Muslim-majority countries such as Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, and Kuwait. Islamists have enjoyed electoral success in Algeria in 1992, Bangladesh in 2001, Turkey in 2002, and Iraq in 2005. Once in power, they can move the country toward Shari’a. As Mahmoud Ahmadinejad faces the wrath of Iranian street demonstrators and bin Laden cowers in a cave, Erdoğan basks in public

8. E.F. Keyman, “Globalization, modernity and democracy: in search of a viable domestic polity for a sustainable Turkish foreign policy”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no:40, 2009, pp.7-27.

9. See, N.Fisher Onur, Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy, *EDAM Papers*, 2009/3; M. Abramowitz and H.J. Barkey, “Turkey’s Transformation”, *Foreign Policy*, November/ December, 2009; and I.O. Lesser, “Turkey to Face Tough Foreign Policy Choices”, *Today Zaman*, 18 September, 2008.

10. For detail, see G. Jenkins, *Political Islam in Turkey: Running West, Heading East*, Palgrave, London, 2009.

11. S. Çağaptay, *AKP’s Foreign Policy: Misnomer of neo-Ottomanism*, www.washingtoninstitute.org, 2009.

approval, remakes the Republic of Turkey, and offers an enticing model for Islamists worldwide.”¹² The kind of thick and ideologically oriented skepticism that Jenkins and Pipes promote in their own work with a different degree of harshness, while presenting a partial and one-sided analysis of Turkey under the AK Party governance, constitutes an unfair, unjust, and unacceptable form of critique. In a time when there is an effort in the West “to win Turkey” by pinpointing its “secular-democratic identity,” rather than imposing on it a “moderate-Islamic quality, as was the case in the neo-conservative Bush administration between 2000-2008, and to do so in such a way that “America, Europe and Turkey can revive (their) fading partnership,¹³ lumping Turkey, Iran, and Al Qaeda in the same category, and reducing it into a simply authoritarian Islamic state, is both ethically unacceptable and strategically wrong. This serves nothing but losing Turkey again in an historical context in which Turkey’s active and positive role is needed to increase the possibility and hope for stability in the Middle East. Such thick skepticism fails to see (a) that Turkey’s re-engagement with the Middle East, while having full accession negotiations with the EU, has not been a *choice of foreign policy orientation without a context*; instead, the new Turkish foreign policy has been operating in accordance with the attempts to create an effective global governance in an era of risk, turbulence, and uncertainty¹⁴ and (b) that the need to break with the highly state and security-centric, reactive and two-dimensional Turkish foreign policy of the Cold War era, in a way to reconstruct it according to the dictates of globalization has been debated since the 1990s, and in that sense, it should not be reduced to the AK Party governance. In fact, calls for proactive and multidimensional Turkish foreign policy date back to the Motherland Party majority government of the 1980s and continued in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, as in the case of diplomatic activism of Foreign Affairs Minister, late İsmail Cem. The AK Party put this new foreign policy vision into practice in a much more developed and crystallized form and explored its “strategic depth” by reading the global context correctly.¹⁵ Thus, the strong and ideological skepticism about the intentions of the AK Party in its new expansionism in the Middle East fails to see (c) that Turkey’s double-facet, west and east; Turkey’s double-language, European and Middle Eastern; Turkey’s two fold-identity, western and eastern, all constitute as intertwined and interrelated sources of a new foreign policy identity. And, in this sense, the success in the greater re-engagement with the East depends to a large extent on the firmness of Turkey’s European vocation. In fact, the recent global attraction to Turkey has occurred precisely because of the ability

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12. D. Pipes, “Lion’s Den: Islamism 2.0 – an even greater threat”, 25 November 2009, *The Jerusalem Post*.

13. P.H. Gordon and O. Taspınar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe and Turkey can revive a fading partnership*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, 2008.

14. Z. Brzezinski, *The Choice*, Basic Books, New York, 2004; F. S. Larrabee and I. O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, RAND, Santa Monica, 2003.

15. For detail, see E.F. Keyman and Z. Onis, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul, 2008, chp: 3 and 4.

Turkey's Prime Minister's strong and recursive critique of an unacceptable human misery and suffering in Gaza has been shared and strongly voiced by social democratic, nationalist and leftist political actors in Turkey.

and capacity of Turkey to achieve the coexistence of these two fold qualities.¹⁶ Finally, Turkey's Prime Minister's strong and recursive critique of an unacceptable human misery and suffering in Gaza is neither an anti-Israel position that the AK Party has put forward to cease or freeze its strategic-alliance with Israel; nor should it be seen as an only and solely Islamist take and discourse on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, as it has been shared and strongly voiced by social democratic, nationalist and leftist political actors both in Turkey and in several Western/European states. In short, this form of skepticism does not offer much to understand the new dynamics and direction of recent Turkish foreign policy.

There is another version of skepticism, which claims that Turkey is turning its back on the West, and moving towards the East. Yet, this version presents a "thin skepticism," which is less ideological in its orientation. It acknowledges that proactive Turkish foreign policy might produce positive results by contributing to peace and stability not only in the Middle East, but also, in the Caucasus, and the Balkans. This criticism claims that the recent de-centered, proactive and multidimensional foreign policy orientation of Turkey with a greater regional engagement with the Middle East constitutes a form of "neo-Ottomanism" that gives primacy to religious-based cultural affinities in expanding its sphere of influence in the region. Such skepticism has been voiced more strongly after Turkey's Prime Minister's critique of Israel's military intervention in Gaza, Turkey's ambiguity on the problem of human suffering in Darfur, and Turkey's intention to play a mediator role in the Iran question. Such skepticism sometimes suggests that even though Turkey's intentions to make new friends, or to revitalize old friendships, in the region should be welcomed and supported as an act of enhancing the possibility of stability in an unstable space in an era of uncertainty, this should not damage old friendships, mainly with Israel; nor should it damage its historical and institutional vocation with, and belonging to, the West. It is understandable that the rapid shift from a passive buffer state identity to a proactive diplomatic activism with greater regional engagement with the Middle East through the employment of soft power and religious affinities can lead to ambiguity, even skepticism, in the West. As long as this skepticism acknowledges that the new Turkish foreign policy identity could contribute to the establishment of the needed stability and dialogue in the Middle East, its warning should be taken seriously. In doing so, Turkish foreign policy would neither lose its firm anchor with the West; nor would its strategic alliance with Israel be damaged.¹⁷

16. See F.Baban and E.F. Keyman, "Turkey and Postnational Europe", *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 11, no: 1, 2008, pp.73-93; and E. Lagro and K.E. Jorgensen (eds.), *Turkey and the European Union: Prospects for a Difficult Encounter*, Pelgrave, New York, 2007.

17. D. Lesser, "Turkey's Otoman mission", *Financial Times*, 23 November 2009; N.Fisher Onur, *Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish foreign Policy*, EDAM Papers, 2009/3; and M. Abramowitz and H.J. Barkey, "Turkey's Transformation", *Foreign Policy*, November/ December, 2009.

The third form of skepticism accepts this warning; yet, instead of taking an ideological stance on Turkish foreign policy, it raises the question of *realism* and *sustainability*: how realistic and sustainable is Turkey's proactive and multidimensional foreign policy in general, and its recent proactive engagement with the Middle East in particular? In other words, can Turkey juggle successfully all of its new interests and multidimensional orientations? Put it differently, if Turkey's diplomatic activism, enlarging in its scope and speed, is a useful force for stability, then how can it acquire realism and sustainability? These serious and difficult questions imply that although the AK Party has been making use of religious affinities and cultural identity in its diplomatic activism and approaching cultural identity as an important source of Turkey's soft power, it is nonetheless untenable to derive from this; a charge that the AK Party is nothing but a type of political Islam combining economic activism with "neo-Ottoman expansionism" in its foreign policy orientation, with which it also aims to transform Turkey internally into a "conservative modernity." They also suggest that Turkey's proactive and multidimensional foreign policy is a rational choice of an actor, thinking strategically, acting pragmatically, and realizing that Turkey's soft power, stemming from its ability to achieve a secular constitutional governance in a social setting with a predominantly Muslim population, constitutes a valuable source and asset for its foreign policy, as much as its historically accepted geopolitical power. Thus, the third skepticism accepts that *the new Turkish foreign policy behavior and orientation is the outcome of rational thinking*; yet, it also voices a concern about its realism and sustainability.¹⁸ The success of any proactive and multidimensional foreign policy depends on, (a) *environment*, i.e., whether or not there is a suitable global context for it; (b) *capacity*, i.e., whether Turkey has the capacity to play an active diplomatic role, if it can, what are the sources of it? and (c) *strategy*, i.e., in what way or through which methodology can Turkey make its foreign policy effective and efficient in a sustainable fashion?¹⁹ In what follows, I will analyze the Turkish foreign policy by elaborating these three criteria, which, I suggest, constitute an adequate and fair critique.

Proactive and multidimensional Turkish foreign policy is a rational attempt to initiate Turkey's expected enhanced strategic partnership role.

Environment: Global Turmoil

Karl Marx suggests in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1882), "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given, and

18. See E.F. Keyman and Z. Onis, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, chp.3; and, P.H. Gordon and O. Taspinar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe and Turkey can revive a fading partnership*, chp.6, and S. Ozel, "Afterword: Turkey's Western Trajectory", in the same book, pp.85-100.

19. For a detailed analysis of how to analyze foreign policy behaviour, see S. Smith, A. Hadfield, and T. Dunne, (eds.) *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008; for an analysis of Turkish foreign policy in this context, E.F. Keyman, "Globalization, modernity and democracy: in search of a viable domestic polity for a sustainable Turkish foreign policy", pp.13-17.

In this sense, Turkey's active diplomacy goes hand in hand with, and has been embedded in, the new global imagination that the establishment of "a global community of shared interest" provides an effective response to global turmoil.

transmitted from the past."²⁰ On the basis of Marx's valuable and explanatory statement, I suggest that a proactive and multidimensional Turkish foreign policy, aiming at establishing "zero conflict/problem-based relations with neighbors, and initiating an active regional engagement to enhance regional dialogue and cooperation, was the AK Party's rational choice, founded theoretically and analytically on the Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's concept of "strategic depth."²¹ It should be pointed out, however, that the rational choice for multidimensional diplomatic activism has not been made under the self-selected circumstances, chosen by the AK Party, but "under circumstances existing already, given, and transmitted from the past" experiences of Turkish foreign policy. The circumstances under which Turkish foreign policy was reconstructed were "global" in nature and scope, and, more importantly, have been shaped by, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has correctly termed, "global turmoil" of which global security risk-zones, such as global "terrorism", the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, global economic crisis including the problems of financial instability, recession, and simultaneous unemployment, global poverty and disparity in the human condition, and global climate change constitute four interrelated dangerous symptoms.²² "Global turmoil manifests itself in a variety of ways," and "recognition of global turmoil as the basic challenge of our time requires confronting complexity."²³ Thus, Brzezinski suggests that it is complexity that has occurred as a result of the simultaneous existence of serious challenges in the areas of security, economy, mass poverty, and climate change, creating turmoil in our globalizing world, and paving the way to the feelings of uncertainty and insecurity for the future. Moreover, all of these challenges are global in nature, and require global solutions. The key issue here is to establish "a global community of shared interest" to promote global cooperation and dialogue, to weave together a broader fabric of multilateralism and soft power, and to build a number of "enhanced strategic partnerships" with which to respond effectively to global challenges.

Turkey's proactive and multidimensional foreign policy constitutes not only a rational choice by the AK party, but also symbolizes Turkey's expected role in the new global imagination that it is only through multilateralism activated on the basis of enhanced strategic partnerships, and by forging a more just, humane and interdependent world vision that the challenge of global turmoil can be addressed.²⁴ In this sense, Turkey's active diplomacy goes hand in hand with, and has been embedded in, the new global imagination that the establishment of "a global community of shared interest" provides

20. K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Die Revolution, New York, 1852.

21. For detail, see A. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth), chp.2 and 3.

22. Z. Brzezinski, *The Choice*, Basic Books, New York, 2004.

23. Ibid. pp.18-20.

24. For details see, Bülent Aras and Hakan Fidan, "Turkey and Eurasia: Frontiers of a New Geographic Imagination," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2009, pp. 195-217.

an effective response to global turmoil. Proactive and multidimensional *Turkish foreign policy is a rational attempt to initiate Turkey's expected enhanced strategic partnership role*. The rational choice to enlarge Turkey's strategic depth in globalization as global interdependence; to employ soft power to complement Turkey's geopolitical power; to initiate regional engagement through diplomatic activism; and link economic dynamism, cultural affinities and geopolitical security together in a way to increase Turkey's sphere of influence regionally, as well as in world politics, is a choice made in a suitable environment, and, in this sense, *proactivism and multidimensionality characterizes Turkish foreign policy in a globalizing world*.

Capacity: Identity-perceptions of Turkey

However suitable the environment is, successful proactivism and multidimensionality in foreign policy requires also capacity, that is, the capacity of Turkey to carry out its regional diplomatic engagements in a way to develop enhanced strategic partnerships with global actors, to enhance global cooperation, and contribute to regional stability in its milieu, leading to coping effectively with global turmoil. It is evident that a new global imagination recognizing the existing global turmoil as the central strategic challenge to our globalizing world behooves Turkey to have an increased presence and role in the following areas:

- The Occupation of Iraq and the Kurdish Question in relation to Northern Iraq
- The Iran Problem and the Future of the Middle East region
- The Russia Question and the Future of Eurasia
- The Crisis of Multiculturalism and the Question of Islam in Europe
- The Clash of Civilizations in Global Politics
- Global Democratic Governance and the Question of Europe as a Global Actor
- Mediterranean Politics and Identity
- Global Political Economy
- Global Energy Politics
- The Membership of the Security Council of the United Nations

As Turkey has been diplomatically active and constructive in these areas, as a quick glance at the global academic and public debate on Turkey and its proactive foreign policy reveals, there has emerged a number of identity-based perceptions that have been attributed to the role of Turkey in our globalizing world, which can be outlined in the following way:²⁵

25. This part is based on my research on *Turkey in a Globalizing World: Actors, Discourses, Strategies*, which has focused on the different perceptions of Turkey in the post-September/11 world. The research is based on a discourse and content analysis of books, articles, newspaper columns, and reports written on Turkey since 2002. The content analysis aims to discover how Turkey has been perceived and what kind of identity-based perceptions have been attributed to Turkish foreign policy in the global academic and public discourse. This research is still in progress, and the findings will be published as a book, tentatively titled as *Turkey in a Globalizing World: Identity, Democracy and Foreign Policy*.

Proactivism and multidimensionality characterizes "Turkish foreign policy in a globalizing world."

In the post-9/11 world of global terrorism, Turkey with its multidimensional identities, appears to be one of the very few examples of combining soft power and hard power, of linking modernity, democracy and security together.

- (a) As a modern nation-state formation with democratic governance and secular constitutional structure, Turkey is a “model country” for the possibility of stability and peace in Iraq in particular, and in the Middle East and Islamic world in general. In fact, with its more than a century-long modernizing reform and constitutional democracy experience, Turkey is the most successful example in the world today of a secular democracy within a Muslim society.
- (b) Turkey’s modern history constitutes both an “alternative to the clash of civilizations thesis” (as in the case of the Inter-Civilization Dialogue Project, led by the United Nations, Spain, and Turkey) and a “significant historical experience” from which the Islamic world, and in particular countries such as Malaysia, Morocco, Indonesia, can learn in their attempts to democratize themselves. Particularly instructive may be the AK Party and its ability to establish an electoral victory through its claim to be a “conservative-democratic center right party.”
- (c) With its ability to sustain, and even deepen, its secular democracy in a peaceful manner, along with its “dual identity as both a Middle Eastern and European country,” Turkey’s recent governance by the AK Party has made Turkey a “pivotal state/regional power” in the process of fighting against global terrorism without making Islam the focal point of opposition;
- (d) In the deepening of Turkey-EU relations and the beginning of full accession negotiations, there is an increasing perception, especially among economic and foreign policy actors, that Turkey is a “unique case in the process of European integration” with the ability to help Europe to become a multicultural and cosmopolitan model for a deeper regional integration, a space for the creation of a post-territorial community on the basis of post-national and democratic citizenship, and also a global actor with a capacity to contribute to the emergence of democratic global governance. The possibility of Europe to gain these qualities depends to some extent on its decision about the accession of Turkey in the European Union as a full member.
- (e) With its dynamic economy, high growth rates, and young population, Turkey has become one of the important, but not pivotal (such as India, Brazil), “emerging market economies” of today’s economic globalization. Moreover, although Turkey does not produce oil or natural gas, it has recently begun to act as an “energy hub” for the transmission of natural gas between the Middle East, the Post-Soviet Republics and Europe.

All of these identity-based perceptions of Turkey represent the increasing capacity of Turkey to involve in regional and global politics as a regional power and pivotal state, increasing its sphere of influence through its soft power, contributing to the

widening and deepening of global consent to enhance global cooperation as a way of responding to the challenge of global turmoil. In fact, in the post-9/11 world of global “terrorism”, in particular, and in our risky and insecure globalizing world, in general, Turkey with its multidimensional identities, with its ability to achieve a secular democracy within a society with a predominantly Muslim population appears to be one of the very few examples of combining soft power and hard power, of linking modernity, democracy and security together, and articulating economic dynamism and cultural identity with geopolitical security concerns.

In Concluding: Realism and Sustainability

There is no doubt that Turkey’s foreign policy choices cannot be separated from its domestic issues. Moreover, it becomes more evident that success in foreign policy depends to a large extent on stability in domestic policy. Turkish foreign policy is no exception in this context, and it is in here that the significance of methodology lies. Methodology implies the questions of realism and sustainability, and in this sense suggests that it is only if proactive and multidimensional foreign policy is sustained by realistic choices and effective domestic support that success can be achieved. Especially, when global turmoil involves serious global economic crisis, great powers conflicts, growing disparities and mass poverty in the human condition, and the “now or never”-based alarming conditions in global climate change, foreign policy choices should be made realistically, and the question of sustainability should be taken seriously.

Two sets of warnings are necessary to put forward at this point. The first concerns the importance of “domestic stability.”²⁶ Larrabee and Lesser suggest ,

“Turkey may be a pivotal state in Western perception, but uncertainties in transatlantic relations may make the very concept of the “West” unclear as seen from Ankara. Above all, Turkey faces daunting political, economic, and social pressures, with implications for the vigor and direction of the country’s foreign and security policies. The range of possibilities is now quite wide, from a more globalized Turkey, more closely integrated in Europe and the West, with a multilateral approach toward key regions, to a more inward-looking and nationalist Turkey, pursuing a more constrained or unilateral set of regional policies.”²⁷

There is, in fact, a strong political and social polarization in Turkey, which has been widening and deepening as Turkish foreign policy takes a more proactive form, attempting to initiate a number of what we have come to know as “democratic

There is no doubt that Turkey’s foreign policy choices cannot be separated from its domestic issues.

26. F. S. Larrabee and I. O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, p.i.

27. *Ibid*, p.iii.

A proactive and multidimensional Turkish foreign policy should be supported by a consolidated democracy domestically, which should be the main concern of the AK Party government, as well as the opposition parties, the military, and the judicial state elites.

openings” in the significant problem areas of Turkish modernity and democracy. Ironically, such democratic openings in the areas of the Kurdish question, the Alevite question, the civil-military relations, the Armenian question, the Religious Minorities question, the Judicial reform, and many others, have been paving the way to an increasing political and social polarization, rather than domestic stability. The key issue here is that of democratic consolidation, and its lack in Turkish politics. A consolidated democracy includes both a formal understanding of democracy as a political regime with institutional norms and procedures, and, more importantly, a substantial understanding of democracy as a specific type of society in which the language of “right, freedoms, and responsibilities” constitutes a dominant normative and legal norm concerning not only the question of “the regulation (or the governance) of societal affairs” but also the question of “the creation of unity in a diverse and multicultural social setting” in a given society.²⁸ As I have explored elsewhere in detail, unless democracy becomes “the only game in town” in Turkey, that is, unless political actors, state elites and civil society organizations internalize democracy both in their own discourses and strategies, as well as in their interactions with one another, Turkey will remain vulnerable to instabilities, polarizations, and separations in its domestic life.²⁹ This means also that a proactive and multidimensional Turkish foreign policy should be supported by a consolidated democracy domestically, which should be the main concern of the AK Party government, as well as the opposition parties, the military, and the judicial state elites.

The second warning concerns the importance of realism in foreign policy choices. Herein lies the significance of what Ian Lesser has correctly termed as “priority setting” in the process of multi-dimensional regional engagements, in order to make its proactive and constructive foreign policy realistic and effective. Lesser argues,

“The entente with Greece, openings with Syria and even with Iran, the prospect of a real opening with Armenia. These are meaningful things but these are all things in Turkey’s neighborhood. If you look at the scope of Turkey’s foreign policy activism in recent years, it does sometimes seem as if Turkey is trying to do all things at once and be all things to all people. Under certain conditions, that could be a perfectly valid approach. When I look ahead, I see the climate for Turkey becoming more difficult and less encouraging to that kind of strategy. Turkey has had the luxury of not having to choose, for example, between Eurasia and the West, between the Muslim world and Europe, etc. In coming years, *Turkish foreign policy will be more about priorities and less about general activism.*”³⁰ (The emphasis is mine)

28. E.F. Keyman and Z. Öniş, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, chp.1.

29. E.F. Keyman, “Globalization, modernity and democracy: in search of a viable domestic polity for a sustainable Turkish foreign policy”, pp.17-27.

30. I. Lesser, “Turkey to face tough foreign policy choices”, *Today’s Zaman*, September 18, 2008, pp.1-6.

I agree with Lesser. In fact, Turkey should place the issue of “priority setting” at the center of its foreign policy orientation. Herein lies the significance of Turkey’s historical European vocation that has taken the form of “full accession negotiations” since 3 October 2005. Despite uncertainties, and the existence of a serious trust problem between Turkey and the EU, Turkey’s European transformation process should remain the “effective anchor” or the “main axis” of Turkey’s new foreign policy identity, rather than Turkey-US relations, Turkey-Eurasia relations, or Turkey acting as an independent state without priority and anchor. Contrary to these three options, Turkey-EU relations are deep integration relations, constructed historically and institutionally, and are generating a number of economic, political and identity-based system-transforming impacts both in Turkey and Europe.³¹ The need to place emphasis on priority over general activism also requires in Turkish foreign policy an effective EU anchor, which is compatible with and useful for Turkey’s regional power and pivotal state role in the era of global turmoil. The more Europeanized Turkey becomes, the more it is perceived positively in the rest of the world, especially in its greater regional engagements. Turkey still looking West is crucial to make its Eastern engagement more realistic, more sustainable, and more successful. It is in this sense that I would suggest that a viable Turkish foreign policy requires (a) a proactive, constructive and multi-dimensional state behavior, (b) taking the concept of soft power seriously, (c) having the EU anchor as the main axis of foreign policy, and (d) coming to terms with the fact that it is not only geopolitics, but also, and more importantly, an articulation of modernity, culture and security, sustained by a consolidated democracy that is the key to its sustainability.

In their recent thought-provoking work on “Winning Turkey”, Philip Gordon and Ömer Taşpınar suggest that “Turkey is not ‘lost’, but it could be unless recent trends are reversed and Turks are given a reason to believe that, as they have for more than eighty years, that their future is best assured as part of the Western world. How can Turkey’s Western and democratic orientation be preserved? What can the United States and Europe do to overcome the growing estrangement between themselves and Turkey? What can Turkey itself do?”³² Winning Turkey requires that the western partners of Turkey approach Turkey’s diplomatic activism through constructive criticism with a special emphasis on the principles of fairness, double tolerance and democratic deliberation, rather than ideologically-loaded thick skepticism in order for Turkey to maintain its Western trajectory, and consolidate its democracy and modernity, as well as to prefer a discourse which will not damage old friendships, while gaining new ones.

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31. For a detailed analysis of these system-transforming impacts, see F.Baban and E.F. Keyman, “Turkey and Post-national Europe”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 11, no: 1, 2008.

32. P.H. Gordon and O. Taşpınar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe and Turkey can revive a fading partnership*, p.61.

Turkey's rapid transition from a buffer state position to a pro-active and multi-dimensional diplomatic activism has led to ambiguities on the aim, intention and realism of the recent Turkish foreign policy. These ambiguities have turned into increased skepticism in certain parts of the western audience about the direction of Turkey. This essay contends that there are three forms of these skepticisms, two of which either are unable and inadequate to comprehend the new dynamics of Turkish foreign policy or don't offer fair criteria to judge Turkish foreign policy. Instead, it offers three objective criteria, namely the environment, capacity and strategy, to examine both viability of the new pro-activism and its potential direction. Further, the study suggests that the sustainability of this multi-dimensional and constructive foreign policy activism requires Turkey to have European Union anchor as the main axis of its foreign policy and a consolidated democracy.

SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Reşit Galip Cd. Hereke Sokak No: 10
GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE
Ph:+90 312.405 61 51 | Fax :+90 312.405 69 03
www.setav.org | info@setav.org

SETA | Washington D.C. Office

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106
Washington, D.C., 20036
Ph: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099
www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org