Transformation of Turkey's Foreign Policy: From Proactivity to (Religious) Idealism

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Introduction

Turkey's foreign policy (generally referred as 'Turkish Foreign Policy') has been an increasingly popular topic among the scholars particularly since the end of the Cold War. After 2002 elections, which brought Justice and Development Party (AKP) to the government, interest towards Turkey's foreign policy became even more visible. Turkey's previous Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was the minister of foreign affairs in the 2009-2014 period and the chief advisor on foreign affairs to the then Prime Minister (and current president) Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the 2003-2009 period, has been praised for his ingenious approach to foreign policy. This approach was constituted of his own concepts such as the ‘zero-problems with neighbours policy’ and ‘strategic depth’, which was also the title of his voluminous 2001 book. He has been heralded as the pioneer of the ‘transformation’ of Turkey’s foreign policy. Most accounts of Turkey's foreign policy in the last decade naturally have focused on Erdogan and Davutoglu’s tenures in the government. These, however, pose a serious problem; not only because the transformation of the foreign policy was initiated by Ismail Cem, who was the minister of foreign affairs between 1997 and 2002, but they also tend to ignore certain trends and conjunctural factors that had their roots in the pre-AKP era. This paper aims at overcoming ahistorical approaches to Turkey's foreign policy and locating the original discourses that initiated the transformation and maintained it. It will be argued that recent developments indicate that Turkey’s foreign policy was transformed during

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Cem’s tenure, while Davutoglu era only maintained Cem’s new proactive policy until opting for a religion/sectarian-based idealism. For this, two eras will be compared and contrasted particularly regarding Middle East policies while the analysis of ideas and political views of two eras will be based on the writings of both intellectual ministers depicting the way ideologies and political conjunctures shape foreign policy and cause conflict and/or cooperation. Before, however, Turkey’s so-called traditional foreign policy will be briefly summarised. Then the principles of Ismail Cem’s foreign policy will be explained and Davutoglu’s foreign policy vision will be reviewed. Finally, changes and continuities between these two eras will be exemplified through analysis of the civilisational discourses in Turkey’s Middle Eastern policy with a focus on Syria as a short case study.

Turkey’s Traditional Foreign Policy

Turkey’s traditional foreign policy has been based on two main pillars namely, “maintaining the status-quo” and “westernism” (Oran 2003, 46-53). After the Lausanne Treaty and establishment of the republic in 1923, Turkey sought to maintain the status quo with its neighbours while opting for a relatively pro-western stance in its foreign policy in line with the domestic reforms. As the Cold War intensified Turkey grew closer to the West by joining the NATO and signing an association agreement with the EEC. Although relations with the West were damaged in some periods, particularly regarding the Cyprus crisis, the general trend continued. Relations with the Middle Eastern states, however, remained minimal and aimed at maintaining the status quo. Turkey avoided involvement in inter-Arab disputes, Arab-Israeli conflict, and other regional conflicts (Sayari 1997, 44). Turkey developed economic and trade relations with the Middle Eastern countries particularly after the 73-74 oil crisis while politically aligning itself more with the Palestinian cause after 1967, but it posed no dramatic change in the overall approach in foreign policy (Sayari, 45).

Following the emergence of the armed rebellion of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in southeastern Anatolia, Turkey became more interested in its neighbours. Although, it was initially seen as a domestic problem, the PKK issue was internationalised due to involvement of Iraq, Syria and at some extent Iran. PKK
insurgency began in 1980s, however, post-Gulf War arrangements in the Northern Iraq allowed PKK to settle there and take advantage of the power vacuum during the fight between Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in the area (Sayari 1997, 47). In response (and based on agreements with the Iraqi government in Baghdad), Turkey conducted military operations to the Iraqi side of the border. Furthermore, Turkey supported Barzani (KDP) against Talabani (PUK) in northern Iraq (Kirisci 2004, 284). So the foreign policy was solely based on “security” concerns and again trying to maintain the status quo, yet in this case it was against establishment of an independent or an autonomous Kurdistan.

To sum up, totality of Turkey’s traditional foreign policy can be viewed as a security-oriented military-strategic approach where Turkey’s (numerically) large army was always on the forefront.

Transformation

Most of the scholarly articles refer to the second half of the Turgut Özal’s presidential era (1988-1993) as a proactive period in Turkey’s foreign policy in which the traditional pillars were somewhat expanded (Öniş 2011; Taşpınar 2008; Hale 2013; Yeşilyurt and Akdevelioğlu 2009). This was a natural response to the end of the Cold War. As the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dissolved newly independent natural gas-rich Turkic-speaking republics emerged in Central Asia and in the vicinity of Turkey. However, sudden death of Özal in 1993 and increase in attacks by the PKK guerrillas constituted a pretext for returning to the traditional security-centric approach. Also the consequences of Gulf War as well as Arab fears of Turkish dominance were effective in this regression (Sayari 1997, 45-6).

The next attempts were during Necmettin Erbakan’s short-lived tenure as Prime Minister from June 1996 till June 1997 when the Turkish Armed Forces forced him to step down. During this short period he sought closer relations with Islamic countries2, but was not successful as the military dictated cooperation agreements with Israel that were detrimental for rapprochement attempts towards Islamic countries. Even though

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2 Islamic in the sense of these countries’ self-identification. For example, Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Bangladesh and so forth.
the “Developing 8 (D8)” group that Erbakan pioneered still exist today, it cannot be considered as an active and effective institution. Erbakan government sought closer relations with groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah as well. Therefore, it is argued that Erbakan’s party tried to diversify the agenda of foreign policy, however, “a major shift was not possible due to structural, institutional, and domestic political factors.” (Kirişçi 1997) It should also be remembered that Erbakan was considered as an Islamist and AKP was founded by the younger reformist generation of his party and its successor which were closed by the constitutional court on charges of “committing acts against the secular republic principle of the constitution”3.

Finally, after Ismail Cem became the minister of foreign affairs during Mesut Yilmaz’s premiership one can pinpoint a continuous transformation in the conduct of foreign policy. As a thinker Ismail Cem had already claimed in 1970 that “with its culture, history, state tradition, strategic significance, folkloric diversity, potential for regional leadership” Turkey had all sources of development, however, ineffective dominant classes could not turn these into dynamics for development (Cem 2012, 445). Cem’s understanding of foreign policy was an extension of these ideas. He believed that “a country which [was] unable to evaluate its capabilities and deficiencies, alienated towards its history [could not] become a serious actor in international politics” (Cem 2009, 13). He claimed that one of the gravest mistakes of the traditional foreign policy was distancing itself from the nations that it has shared a history, the Balkans, Northern Africa and the Middle East with the hope that this distancing would make Turkey more acceptable to Western Europe (Cem 2009, 15). In this respect Cem identified five main assets of the foreign policy of the new Turkish government at the 1997 United Nations (UN) General Assembly as the following:

1. Historical asset and its revaluation; the modern crossroads of the East and the West.
2. Cultural identity, the privilege of being a European nation, as well as an Asian nation.
3. A thriving economy; great potentials of industry, trade and tourism.

3The decision can be accessed through the Constitutional Court’s website. Decision no: 2001/2, date: 22.6.2001. http://www.kararlaryeni.anayasa.gov.tr/Karar/Content/0a6f1734-1ab5-49f7-aea8-77764a0f3b7?highlightText=fazilet%20partisi&excludeGerekce=False&wordsOnly=False
4. Proven parameters of stability and peace in a huge and most disturbed geographic region, which holds the major energy resources of the world, as well as economic prospects.

5. “The Turkish Model”, the main, if not the only experience in the world of a country with Islamic traditions, which has adopted pluralist, democratic institutions, human rights, secular laws, gender equality. (Cem 2001, 57)

Furthermore, he labelled improving relations with neighbours as a foreign policy priority where Turkey would respond with two steps if one positive step came from any party (Cem 2001, 58). In the end what Ismail Cem sought to achieve was making Turkey an “integral part of the European integration process” and “to transform Turkey into a pivotal and prosperous country at the center of [...] Eurasia” (Cem 2002, 4).

Cem understood that economics replaced military might in the 2000s and therefore Turkey needed emphasis on economic relations as well as its historical, cultural, and political assets (Cem 2002, 1). For this reason, structure of the ministry of foreign affairs was reorganised in order to reflect this emphasis during his tenure (Kirişçi 2009, 45-46).

Foreign policy rhetoric is significant as it helps shaping the perceptions, however, one also needs to examine the conduct of foreign policy in order to locate discrepancies and paradoxes. It would be just to say that Ismail Cem’s vision that has been summarised above only became perceivable in foreign policy starting with 1999. This was due to several domestic political factors. First was PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan’s capture early that year and the second was the election victory of Democratic Left Party (DSP) which made the party leading partner of the coalition government.

Cem was able to reflect his foreign policy visions into actual foreign policy-making as exemplified by Turkey’s growing economic, social, and diplomatic relations with its neighbours as well as securing Turkey’s EU candidacy at the 1999 Helsinki Summit (Ormeci 2011, 241).

Rise of AKP and Foreign Policy

In the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, Turkey initiated reforms under IMF’s and Kemal Dervis’s direction who became the economy minister outside the
parliament. Despite the signals of recovery in the economy, the coalition government started to tremble as disagreements between the partners became frequent and vocal. Particularly reforms required for the EU membership caused tensions between the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and the rest of the coalition. Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's illness also contributed to this process. Finally, with dissident members resigning from the largest coalition partner DSP and another partner MHP campaigning for an early general election the parliament decided to have election on 3 November 2002 (Radikal 2002).

In November 2002 AKP came to power with a landslide victory in the general elections. Shortly after the elections, high-ranking AKP officials declared that the party was committed to EU membership prospects and increasing regional cooperation while maintaining the non-partisan nature of foreign policy without any ideological or religious concerns (Cagaptay 2002, 46). Accordingly no immediate change in foreign policy could be seen after the elections. Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu was appointed as the chief advisor on foreign affairs to the Prime Minister in early 2003, however, until 2004 he has not been visible in public as well as policy conduct. After 2004 he has started to be seen in the media with his foreign policy analyses and visions. He argued that Turkey needed to be a “centre” (or pivotal) country and for this there were five main principles: “1. Freedom and security equilibrium allowing Turkey to be a model country; 2. Zero-problems-with-neighbours; 3. Multi-dimensional foreign policy; 4. Identifying Turkey as a central country; 5. Dynamic/rhythmic diplomacy” (Davutoğlu 2004).

Despite the initial statements after the election, as time passed Davutoglu and other high-ranking officials in AKP claimed that the 2002 elections were a breaking point in Turkish history and foreign policy (Yeşilyurt and Akdevelioğlu 2009, 41). The principles Davutoglu put forward, however, closely echo, if not paraphrase, Ismail Cem’s foreign policy vision as articulated in his UN General Assembly speech. Actually, they even lack the economic aspect that Cem emphasised as early as 1997.

Interestingly enough very few scholars and commentators acknowledged the fact that the AKP era foreign policy was actually a continuation of Ismail Cem era’s bold transformation. While certain scholars refer to the Cem era as the root of the AKP activism, they do not elaborate on these and they continue their analyses as if in
November 2002 Turkey woke up from almost a century old sleep (Taşpınar 2008; Öniş and Yılmaz 2009; Altunışık and Tür 2005; Altunışık 2009; Altunışık and Martin 2011; Aras and Karakaya Polat 2008). Even the three volume Turkish Foreign Policy textbook covering from 1919 to 2012 that was edited by Professor Baskın Oran refers to Ismail Cem era very superficially and only in detail in reference to relations with Greece (Oran 2003a; 2003b; 2013). Although it needs to be iterated that Turkey’s rapprochement with Greece and beginning of close relations under Cem and Georgios Papandreu is a very important milestone in Turkey’s transformed foreign policy. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Altunisik and Martin (2011) points to as the “difference between the first and the second AKP governments”. According to their analysis Turkey’s Middle East policy changed mainly after Israel’s “Operation Cast Lead” against Gaza in December 2008 (during the second AKP government) (Altunışık ve Martin 2011, 573). Before this Turkey was actually mediating between Syria and Israel, and also it had significantly good relations with Israel. This problem with Israel, which was intensified with the 2010 Mavi Marmara flotilla incident, led Turkey to develop cooperation with Iran regarding the terrorism issue, energy transactions, as well as the nuclear deadlock between the West and Iran (Altunışık ve Martin 2011, 574).

Turkey’s intense involvement with the Middle East especially during the second AKP government has also been analysed on the basis of its relations with the European Union. The “axis change” argument regarding Turkey’s foreign policy is also based on the deteriorating relations with the EU (Kardas 2010). Rather than going along with the normal accession process, Turkey opted for a more “power politics” approach and therefore become less interested with the EU (Kardas 2010). The Kemalist elite which lost its control of the state apparatus with the help of the EU reforms, argue that the AKP used EU accession process as a means to consolidate their power and since their power now cannot be challenged by the military and other bureaucratic powers, it was able to turn to the Middle East which has actually been their main objective (Taşpınar 2008).

Soli Özel and Serhat Güvenç (2012) and Ozan Örmeci (2011a; 2011b) may be among the very few Turkish scholars who purport that the most of the foreign policy elements of AKP were put in place by Ismail Cem. Separately, in the latest edition of his authoritative book on Turkey’s foreign policy William Hale (2013) asks whether the activism in the foreign policy, particularly towards Middle East, was new. He answers by claiming that the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) financial programme which was
adopted following the 2001 economic crisis enabled Turkey to have a stable economy to pursue foreign policy goals, therefore “the AKP administration successfully exploited pre-existing opportunities, rather than creating new ones” (Hale 2013, 254).

Davutoglu’s Vision and “Civilisation”

In Ismail Cem’s writings and speeches the term civilisation is used in reference to cultures that have previously existed in Turkey’s geography. Most of the time civilisation is a mere synonym for culture in these contexts. We can also find references to Huntington’s (1993) “clash of civilisations” thesis but these are mainly counter-arguments against his depiction of Turkey's position in this clash. Cem rejects identification as “Western” or “Islamic” but instead depicts Turkey as a multi-civilisational country (Cem 2001, 49). His policies that sought and won EU candidacy as well as rapprochement with Syria and other regional states can be seen as reflection of such an understanding in practice.

In his magnum opus Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)⁴, Davutoglu argues, on the surface, that Turkey should embrace its past, history, culture and with their help emerge as a pivotal state in the region (Davutoğlu 2011). The way to achieve this, he argues, is pursuing a strategic policy that would increase its influence. Geopolitical concepts he uses are actually borrowed from the 19th and early 20th century Western strategists such as Haushofer, Mackinder, Mahan, Spykman etc. who had inspired first the Western imperial powers and then the Nazi regime (Ozkan 2014; Kivanc 2015). In his books, speeches and articles the emphasis on the concept of civilisation can easily be seen. It is argued that “civilisation” in his writing mainly refer to Islam in opposition to “Western” civilisation therefore when analysing the discourses one needs to look for the words civilisation and/or Islam.

The concept of “civilisation” plays a fundamental role in Davutoglu’s intellectual mind-set. From his early days as a junior academic he attributed a special importance to the subject. In his speeches his references to “civilisation” have always been explicit and dominant. Most scholars agree that in order to understand Davutoglu’s mind-set both as

⁴ Unfortunately, this book is yet to be translated into any of the western European languages. Therefore, the Turkish edition is used for the purposes of this paper.
an intellectual and a policy-maker one needs to delve into his writings prior to *Strategic Depth* (Köse, Okumuş and Duran 2014; Ozkan 2014; Kıvanç 2015).

One of these writings entitled “Self-Perception\(^5\) of Civilisations” is considered as the central piece that explains Davutoğlu’s world-view as a whole and is the statement of the underlying arguments in the rest of his works (Ardıç 2014). This lengthy article is essentially a comparison of the “western civilisation” and the “Islamic civilisation” in terms of their “essences”. In the beginning Davutoğlu seems to be disagreeing with the Huntingtonian “clash of civilisations” argument by claiming that it exemplifies a selfish one-sided history perception shared by “the West” (Davutoğlu 1997, 2-3). In the main body of the article he contrasts two civilisations using Galtung’s “six constraints under which perception takes place” and are characteristic of “the Western man” (Galtung 1984, 22-24).\(^6\) Based on the difference between the West and Islam in terms of these perception constraints, Davutoğlu argues that there are inherent “conflict zones” in the mind-sets.\(^7\) This means that the essences of these two civilisations are distinct and conflictual which essentially affirms Huntington’s “clash” thesis in general. What Davutoğlu disagrees is the representation of Turkey which does not fit with his own vision. While Huntington (1993) sees Turkey as a “torn country”, Davutoğlu sees this understanding as a part of the Western self-perception and Kemalist elites’ self-perception; whereas in reality core Turkish self-perception should lie in the Islamic civilisation.

One of the most significant problems with Davutoğlu’s approach is that he portrays civilisations as monolithic and homogeneous entities. This is very similar to the realist conception of state as a singular actor like a billiard ball in international relations theory. Although this conception is being represented with references to concepts such as “glocalisation”, “post-Westphalian order”, or “post-nation-state era”; the monolithic perception of “civilisation” does not resonate historically, culturally, or politically in the contemporary social studies. In his understanding, Francis Fukuyama’s (1989) “end of history” thesis represents the Western civilisation perfectly, however, the categories and

\(^5\) Although the text is in Turkish, Davutoğlu makes explicit reference to the concept “selbstverständnis” as used by Edmund Husserl, therefore Turkish word for the concept is translated as such.

\(^6\) It needs to be noted that Galtung’s criteria and arguments regarding the civilisations have a distinct context of crises and economics; therefore applicability of the categories are debatable.

\(^7\) He actually utilises the term “self-perception”, however, I believe in this context “mind-set” is a more appropriate term to explain what he means.
concepts he uses such as “self-perception”, “life-world”, “geopolitics”, “geostrategy” are also products of that very civilisation. There seems to be a contradiction in his argumentation. Furthermore, Fukuyama’s and Huntingtons’s theses have been widely opposed by the so-called “Western” scholars as well. The continental-analytic divide in philosophy is another significant condition that shows the heterogeneity in the Western civilisation. Even the Atlantic rift in the social studies and particularly in International Relations discipline exemplify the richness and the pluralism within the “civilisation”. In the final analysis, it would not be too bold to claim that Davutoglu re-interprets and presents history and concepts so that they fit in his ultimate vision: revival of Islam with Turkey’s leadership.

Davutoglu actually believes that the Islamic civilisation has been awakening especially since the end of the Cold War. But this awakening requires a new self-perceptive Islamic intellectual class that should endeavour to revitalise the civilisational self-perception in the Islam geography. Strategic Depth and Davutoglu-era foreign policy are all extensions of this civilisation rhetoric. This rhetoric encompasses a pseudo-scientific language with Islamic overtones. According to Davutoglian understanding of international relations, history and historical events can easily be used as examples outside their timelines and contexts. For example, Nazi Germany is presented as a natural extension of the “German strategic mind-set” which was also the basis of the Holy Roman Empire (Davutoglu 2011, 29-36). These ahistorical and out-of-context examples enable him to depict Turkey as an extension of Ottoman Empire (particularly Golden Age of 16\textsuperscript{th} century and Abdulhamid II era of 1876-1909). The underlying proposition is that the Ottoman rule was the manifestation of the Islamic civilisation that is spread along the “Afro-Eurasian continent” (Davutoglu 2011, 254-255). The timeless Islamic civilisation, led by the self-perceptive intellectual class which possesses Islamic knowledge and necessary means to form new generations according to this vision, would rise as an alternative to the “positivist”, “modernist”, “universalist”, “secularist” claims of the Western civilisation.

This conceptualisation shows a stark contrast to Ismail Cem’s civilisation understanding. Despite Cem’s emphasis on Islamic culture and Ottoman past they are presented as complimentary to Western elements of Turkey’s identity. Therefore, European Union and the universal values such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights are seen as part of Turkey’s vision as well. Although, sometimes Cem opts for
using “civilisations” in plural and characterising Turkey as a multi-civilisational society what he mainly conveys is the combination of cultural and political traditions produced and fed by past civilisations of Anatolia such as the Hittites, Byzantines, Armenians, Seljuks etc. Nonetheless, in the contexts similar to Davutoglu’s writings, he refers to a “human civilisation” that is universal because it is the product of “millennia, of all peoples and all geographies”, not distinct Western or Islamic civilisations (Cem 2001, 61).

A Short Case Study: Middle East Policy

Turkey’s involvement in Middle East has been minimal as explained regarding the traditional foreign policy. Relations with Syria, in particular, have not been peaceful due to several reasons: the Hatay issue and water issue. Hatay is a province located in southern Turkey on the Mediterranean coast bordering Syria. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire it was attached to Syria, which was under French mandate. Hatay province became an independent state in 1938 under French supervision and following a referendum its parliament decided to join Turkey as a province in 1939. When Syria gained its independence from France in 1946, it did not recognise this annexation claiming that the agreement was made between France and Turkey not Syria and Turkey. Water issue was about the use of River Euphrates’ waters, as within the framework of South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) Turkey built several dams on the course of the river and Syria demanded more water to be released. Hafez al-Assad administration harboured PKK and particularly PKK’s leader Abdullah Ocalan as a political response to these aforementioned issues (Kirişçi 1997; Sayari 1997; Martin 2000). In 1998, Turkish military massed on the Syrian border and threatened the Assad regime with a military attack if it did not expel PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. Through Egypt’s mediation the Adana Protocol was signed and as a result Ocalan was expelled which led to his apprehension in early 1999. After the 1999 elections, and following the devastating earthquake in August that year, Turkey’s foreign policy started to be led by its aspiration to become a full EU member.

In 2000, we have witnessed the practice of desecuritisation on behalf of the Turkish state. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer attended Hafez al-Assad’s funeral, which
marked an attempt at normalising the relations. It was significant in the sense that less than two years before two countries were on the brink of war. Political rapprochement naturally had a spill over effect towards economics and annual trade volume between two countries started to increase significantly (Larrabee and Lesser 2003, 146; Tür 2011, 592). When AKP came to power, relations with Syria were rapidly developing. In such a conjuncture and continuity, the two countries grew closer. In January 2004 when Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad visited Turkey, he said they ‘have together shifted from an atmosphere of distrust to trust’. In 2005, Turkey’s President Ahmet Necdet Sezer visited Syria again and afterwards high level visits including the prime minister and ministers became more and more frequent. Assad even said that Turkey’s and Syria’s perspectives on the region were very similar. Following this desecuritisation process in actions, speeches, and policies, Turkish government became more active in the regional affairs and started mediating between Israel and Syria between 2007 and 2008. In 2009, High Level of Strategic Cooperation Council was established and within the framework of this council, Turkish and Syrian cabinets had joint sessions. Also visa requirements for the citizens of the respective countries were abolished making it very easy to travel and taxes for TIRs travelling through Syria were abolished as well. Nevertheless, when the opportunity surfaced in 2011 following the Arab Spring, Davutoğlu immediately met with the leaders of the Syrian opposition who started an armed resistance against the Assad regime.

Throughout the crisis in Syria, Davutoğlu has expressed Turkey’s commitment to promotion of democracy, human rights, freedom, and equality. Turkey position towards Syria, according to Davutoğlu, shifted due to Assad’s disrespect for the rights of the Syrian people and his disregard of the friendly warnings and advices of Turkey. Although these idealistic elements were present in Cem’s visions (for example he attempted at convincing Saddam Hussein to allow UN inspectors), Davutoğlu’s explicit reference to these produced a value-based idealistic foreign policy. Idealism implies a revisionism in the Turkish case which is also exemplified by statements by Davutoğlu that criticise the pre-AKP foreign policies as policies that only tried to maintain the status-quo. The then Prime Minister Erdogan’s emotional promises that “in a few months we will be at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus for our Friday prayer” even hints at a hidden irredentism (Hürriyet 2012).
The economic aspects of Turkey’s engagement with the Middle Eastern states need to be considered as well. The economic stabilisation program which was devised by the IMF after the 2001 economic crisis and which was put in force by Kemal Dervis during the pre-AKP era, was very successful and Turkish economy started to grow significantly (Tür 2011, 592). When AKP came into power, by continuing the stabilisation program it was able to harness the fruits of this policy. This economic development has also led Turkey to seek other markets and in the search Turkey opened up to the Middle East economically (Tür 2011, 592). It should also be realised that Turkey's increasing economic ties with the Middle East was also a natural response to the financial crises in the United States and the European Union which necessitated Turkey to integrate with the Middle Eastern markets in order to maintain its economic growth.

Turkey's foreign policy also assumed another supposed aspect under the AKP rule: A model Muslim liberal democratic country for the region. Turkey being a model is sometimes echoed in the neo-Ottomanist discourse which emphasises historical and cultural ties while calling for a more democratic rule in the region. However, it is curious that Ismail Cem's spectre has not haunted any of the commentators or scholars who attributed this view to the ingenious foreign policy making of Davutoglu. It was, perhaps, because Cem’s model country involved a harmony of cultures and persistent desire to join the EU while Davutoglu’s model was Sunni and focused on project a Turkey-led Muslim power to the region. Especially after the Arab Spring, Turkey aligned itself with the movements that sought democratisation in some countries, while remaining silent in the other ones. For instance, when she distanced itself from Syria (with whom it had very good economic and political relations) Turkey started harbouring the Free Syrian Army (Kemal 2012), while signing military cooperation agreements with Sudan whose dictator has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for genocide charges. So in a sense while Turkey has been championing democratic values Turkey ignored some states' shortcomings in human rights issues such as Iran and Sudan (Hale 2013, 256). Also domestic crises including killing of 34 civilian Kurds in 2011 by an airstrike and the police brutality against mass demonstrations at Gezi Park in 2013 show that Turkey has not yet internalized the values it supposedly promotes.

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8 Ratification of the related law can be found in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, No: 28588, 15 March 2013.
It has been depicted that the AKP government’s foreign policy did not have original discourses as the policies it adopted, albeit dubbed differently, were incepted during Ismail Cem’s tenure as the minister of foreign affairs. That being said, it needs to be acknowledged that the idealistic overtones have come to forefront after Davutoglu became minister in 2009 and especially following the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, it needs to be reiterated that Davutoglu or Erdogan never spoke of these idealistic values regarding Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar or United Arab Emirates. Turkey’s championship for democracy and human rights seem to be just for Syria and post-Muslim Brotherhood Egypt. Furthermore, an increasing religious tone can be located in the discourses of Turkish officials both in domestic and foreign policy. Erdogan’s desire to pray in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, his statements emphasizing the sect (Sunni) of the victims of a mortar strike in a border city in Turkey, a covert support for the Islamic State manifested by easy transits of would-be-jihadists to Syria can be counted among recent significant examples. In the past Davutoglu openly called for support for Islamic movements in the Middle East against ethnic and nationalist movements (Ozkan 2014, 131). Thus, Turkey’s alleged support for the Islamic State and/or Jabhat al-Nusrah does not seem unrealistic in the light of Davutoglu’s philosophy and politics. Davutoglu (and Erdogan) use a “civilisation” rhetoric that seems to be conciliatory but in essence fed by the “clash” implication. As elaborated the civilisational vision of Davutoglu (and Erdogan) engenders the revival of the Islamic civilisation led by Turkey. Therefore, foreign policy choices have been on the basis of accomplishing this religious idealist task and consequentially put Turkey in an impasse. One of the newspapers known for its proximity to Davutoglu reported the progress of the “Army of Conquest” with delight deeming it to be the umbrella organisation of Syrian Rebels9 (Diriliş Postası 2015).

Even though it has been argued that Ahmet Davutoğlu’s forced resignation was as a result of disagreement between him and the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan there are hardly any evidence to support such a claim. They both still use the civilisation rhetoric in their speeches. For example, recently at the graduation ceremony of a university he claimed that when spoken of Ottomans people think of a civilisation that ruled with justice and “we have a clean history which is not stained by colonialism. Our ancestors

9 The Army of Conquest or Jaish al-Fatah is a Sunni-Islamist union of several groups including but not limited to Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar ash-Sham and Turkistan Islamic Party.
supported Africans’ free and honourable will to live by sending army as well as making them protectorates” (Habertürk 2016). It is almost an oxymoronic rhetoric of criticising colonialism through giving examples of Ottoman colonial policies. Accordingly, Turkey’s foreign policy at this juncture still seem to be at the same impasse caused by its blind idealism. Involvement in Syria without a true evaluation of its capabilities is very indicative of idealism which disillusioned practitioners with prospect of leadership of the Sunni world and a power projection reminiscent of the Ottoman era.

Conclusion

There is a consensus that Turkey’s foreign policy has become more proactive after 2002 general election when AKP came to power. These analyses pinpointing the transformation of foreign policy suffer from an ahistorical approach, which ignores the pre-AKP developments. It has been argued that the transformation of Turkey’s foreign policy started during Ismail Cem’s tenure as the minister for foreign affairs between 1997 and 2002. AKP governments maintained the activism initiated by Cem up to 2011. Yet, following the Arab Spring opted for a religion/sectarian-based idealism with aspirations for dominating the region. Turkey’s divergence from the Cem era activism towards an aspiration involving a great capabilities-expectation gap caused the impasse Turkey is in regarding the crisis in its immediate neighbourhood and the risks emanating from the existence of the Islamic State next to its border. There seems no short-term resolution for the crises and Turkey’s foreign policy is getting deeper and deeper into a quicksand of hostile neighbours, groups, and an ever-increasing despotic authoritarianism of its own President.
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