

# Recovery From the Age of Discovery

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The Next Four Years of Turkish Foreign Policy

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On June 12, 2011, Turks gave Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan a clear mandate for another term in office. Erdogan thus ensured his place in the history books as the most successful politician in the land. He has won three consecutive elections, increasing his share of the total vote each time. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 with 34 percent of the national vote. With Erdogan at the helm, the AKP increased this to 47 percent of the vote in the 2007 elections and 50 percent in the 2011 elections.

This electoral victory will also be interpreted as a vindication of the more assertive and ambitious foreign policy that Erdogan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu had been championing. The AKP's foreign policy narrative has become the overriding paradigm for a significant part of Turkish public opinion. It is no coincidence that, in his speech on the evening of the elections, Erdogan chose to speak about Sarajevo, Damascus, Ramallah, and Jerusalem as part of his *tour d'horizon*. Having received a renewed, strong popular mandate, the government in Ankara will be all the more comfortable in its role as a regional power.

## From Conceptualization to Full Implementation: The Middle East in Turkish Foreign Policy

The next four years of foreign policy undertaken by the AKP-led government in Ankara will be characterized by the growing importance of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). During the first AKP era (2002–2007), the MENA region was at best a side show in Turkey's international relations. The focus was on the European Union (EU) and, to the extent that the countries in the region had a place in Turkish foreign policy thinking, it was to counter and contain the emerging security challenges associated with neighboring countries like Iraq and Syria. The second AKP era (2007–2011) witnessed the conceptualization of a new Turkish foreign policy under Davutoglu, who took office in 2009, which firmly placed the MENA region at the center of Turkish diplomacy. The third AKP era will now consolidate this trend and seek to cement a virtuous cycle of political and economic cooperation between Turkey and the newly democratizing Arab states.

There are at least three reasons for this claim. There is, first of all, a growing certainty that the Arab Spring and the road to democracy will be fraught with difficulties and uncertainties. As illustrated by the events unfolding in Syria, Turkey will have to remain focused on regional developments and revisit its policies toward the region. The Arab Spring has the potential to upend the “zero problems with neighbors” policy. Turkey will have to choose between the “zero problems with regimes” approach and more visible support for the demands of the political opposition in neighboring countries. In Egypt, Ankara was quick in calling for the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. But in Libya, the response was far more hesitant. Turkey strived to maintain its relationship with Muammar Gaddafi while engaging the opposition in Benghazi. The presence of almost 25,000 Turkish workers on Libyan territory and a backlog of construction projects worth \$15 billion were certainly part of Ankara’s calculus. This delicate balancing act led, however, to a severe deterioration of Turkey’s image with the opposition movement. Ankara eventually redressed the situation by openly siding with states demanding Gaddafi’s resignation. A financial assistance package worth \$300 million was also promised to the National Libyan Council. Now a similar, but potentially more severe, challenge awaits Ankara in its relations with Damascus.

Yet despite these uncertainties, Turkish policymakers tend to view the changes in Arab countries as a significant opportunity for Turkey. In years past, Turkey’s relations with Arab states were shaped by the country’s Ottoman legacy, its clearly pro-Western diplomacy, and its reticence to take part in the region’s long-standing disputes. The consensual belief was that there was very little to be gained from a wider involvement in the affairs of the Middle East. Today, Ankara projects a very different image in the region with its enhanced soft power and burning desire to become involved in the region’s outstanding problems. Ankara also believes that the opening of the political space to new actors will do away with the limitations imposed on relations with Turkey by some of the more hesitant Arab leaders, such as Mubarak and King Mohammed VI of Morocco. The AKP-led Turkish government is intent on relying on its growing popularity in the Arab street and its established network of relations with some of the emerging players of the body politic to assert the influence of Turkey in the whole region.

Ankara also views the diversification of its political and economic relations with the region as a lever to achieve its goal of becoming the tenth largest economy in the world by 2023. In other words, the development of the MENA region is expected to fuel the growth of the Turkish economy. Much like the reconstruction of Europe helped Germany to regain its role as an economic powerhouse, the positive and mutually reinforcing dynamics of political liberalization and economic growth in the MENA region are to buoy Turkey’s ascendancy into the global league of economic giants.

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## A Reset With Egypt

The AKP's next era of Turkish diplomacy will coincide with heavy political investment in Egypt. Egypt is seen in Ankara as the key country for the future of the Arab region. The relationship that is struck with the emerging leadership in Egypt will be crucial in determining Turkey's long-term role in the MENA region. The objective is to set the relationship on an entirely new footing.

Ankara's relationship with Cairo has historically been a difficult one. Egypt gained its autonomy under the Ottomans in 1871 and was the first Muslim entity of the Ottoman world to do so. In the aftermath of colonialism, President Gamal Abdel Nasser's virulent Pan Arabism hindered any sort of rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt. Even under Mubarak, the relationship was at best cordial. Mubarak viewed Turkey as a competitor for influence in the region. This perception was strengthened by Ankara's growing involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Egyptian leader was also uneasy about Erdogan's growing popularity among Egyptians and Arabs more generally. He ultimately remained distant to the AKP leadership due to their Islamist roots.

Mubarak's disappearance from the political scene and the emergence of a host of new actors ready to engage with Turkey's leadership is viewed in Ankara as a historic opportunity to redress and substantially improve the relationship with this crucial Arab country. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the first visit of a head of state to Cairo after the regime change was that of Turkish President Abdullah Gül. On his visit, Gül met not only with the acting head of the transitional council, Mohamad Hussain Tantawi, but also with the representatives of all political parties ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to the Liberal Wafd, even including the youth of Tahrir Square. Emboldened by the messages of friendship, he stated that Turkey was ready to help Egypt facilitate its transition to democracy. Following in his footsteps, Erdogan is getting ready to visit Cairo after his electoral victory in June and the traditional first two visits of Turkish prime ministers to Lefkoshia and Baku.

The rebalancing of the relationship with Egypt will be all the more important as a post-Mubarak Egypt has the potential to regain some, if not most, of its influence in the Sunni Arab world. A robust relationship with a reinvigorated Egypt will be critical for the success of many of the initiatives that Turkey is set to undertake as a regional power. Such an outcome would be more conducive to a cooperative diplomacy between Cairo and Ankara to further peace in the Middle East. A more unified Turkish-Egyptian front would also cement the fragile Palestinian unity by foreclosing the traditional game of influence between Turkey and Egypt over Hamas and Fatah.

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## **Repositioning for a More Active Role in Middle East Peace**

Turkey's official rhetoric on the Palestinian issue became more strident during the AKP's second term in power. Erdogan caused a sensation in Arab countries when he openly quarreled with Israeli President Shimon Peres during a debate held at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2009, a few weeks after the Israeli offensive against Gaza. The tragedy of the people living under embargo in Gaza was also highlighted by the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident. The very visible espousal of the cause of the Palestinians, in a way that was alien to Turkey's established diplomatic practice, certainly helped the Turkish prime minister—and by extension Turkey—to gain a large vote of sympathy among Arabs.

Under the third AKP government, Turkey will seek to reposition itself as a potential mediator between the Palestinians and Israel. Ankara squandered the privileged position that it previously held in 2009 with its increasingly critical rhetoric against Tel Aviv. Although this shift helped the Turkish government gain popularity in the Arab street, it also sidelined Turkey from the Middle East peace process. Arguably this underprivileged position is not compatible with the ambitious vision of being an “order setter” in the region. Ankara will therefore gradually shift its position to re-insert itself in the game of the Arab-Israeli negotiations.

On one hand, Ankara will be expected to give strong support to the Palestinian Unilateral Declaration of Independence at the United Nations General Assembly in September. On the other, Ankara will use its influence to push Hamas to recognize Israel. Ankara has already become more active on this front and is working for the release of Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier taken hostage by Hamas.

## **Improvement in Relations With Israel**

The second AKP term was characterized by the crisis in Turkey's relationship with Israel. The turning point was Israel's military intervention in Gaza in January 2009. The ensuing acrimony turned into a full-blown crisis with the Mavi Marmara incident in May 2010. Today, the relationship is stuck with Turkey awaiting a formal apology and compensation from Israel.

AKP's third term is likely to witness an improvement in the relationship between Ankara and Tel Aviv. The two sides are already seeking to mend fences and negotiating the wording of the expected public apology. Two different dynamics have influenced this outcome. It should be recalled that some of the heavy rhetoric used by the AKP leadership against Israel had a domestic purpose. Erdogan wanted to prevent the more Islamist element of his constituency from

migrating to the Saadet Partisi (SP), a competing Islamist political party founded by Erdogan's mentor and former prime minister Necmettin Erbakan. The backing by AKP of Mavi Marmara's eventually tragic trip to Gaza in May 2010 is closely connected to Turkish domestic politics. Results from the June elections, in which SP received only 1.2 percent of the national vote, proved the migration threat moot. The election results demonstrated that the AKP and Erdogan have emasculated Turkey's residual center right, conservative, and Islamist parties. There will therefore be less of a domestic leitmotif for the AKP leadership to retain a stridently anti-Israeli discourse.

The second factor relates to the change in regional dynamics. The government in Ankara realized that it has more to gain from improved relations with Israel than ever before. Turkey would, under these conditions, regain its position as the privileged interlocutor of the two sides to the Palestinian conflict, a role that Ankara held until 2009. Changes in regional dynamics, with Egypt having acquired the ability to play a much more influential role, as demonstrated by Cairo's impact on the Hamas-Fatah deal, is pushing Turkish policymakers to seek an early resolution to their dispute with Israel. This is reciprocated on the Israeli side, where the Arab upheavals have blurred the strategic picture. In particular, the end of the Mubarak era in Egypt and the growing instability in Syria are likely to impel Israeli authorities to urgently resolve their conflict with Turkey. For Tel Aviv, Ankara's neutrality, if not support, will become even more critical in a Middle East where the regional security order will face new challenges.

## The Paradox of Syria

For Ankara, the relationship with Syria epitomized the success of the "zero problems with neighbors" policy. Turkey and Syria had come to the brink of war in 1998 due to the support of then-President Hafez al-Assad, father of the current president, Bashar al-Assad, for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Ankara's overture to Syria shortly thereafter allowed for a fundamental reset of the relationship. In many ways, Syria became the poster child for Turkey's new neighborhood policy. Ankara and Damascus lifted visa requirements and held joint cabinet meetings. Erdogan and Bashar al-Assad spent their vacations together on the Turkish coast. In the face of initial Western criticism, Ankara defended this policy of rapprochement as a counter-move to Iranian influence in Damascus.

Ankara's ties to the Syrian leadership were tested with the broadening of the Arab revolts to Syria. Initially, Ankara tried to leverage its political capital in Damascus to convince the Assad regime to introduce democratic reforms. The continuing intransigence of the Assad regime and its refusal to commit to a clear agenda for democratic reforms, combined with a growing number of Syrian refugees crossing the Turkish border, led Turkish policymakers to reevaluate their approach. Ankara became more critical and sent a strong message to Assad

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by allowing the Syrian opposition to meet twice in Turkey. The Syrian situation caused Turkish policymakers to reassess not only their attitude toward this neighboring country but Turkey's position vis-à-vis the Arab revolts in general. Accordingly, Davutoglu convened Turkish ambassadors posted to the region a few days after the June 12 elections. The discussions in Ankara led to the end of the “zero problems with regimes” approach.

The Arab reforms have helped to uncover the fundamental weakness of this policy. The “no problem with neighbors” policy would have forced Turkish policymakers to clearly side with incumbent leaders at a time when the political space in the Arab world is finally starting to be contested. On the other hand, support to the emerging opposition would have undermined the policy of good relations with neighboring regimes. That was Ankara's conundrum in Egypt, in Libya, and also in Syria. The government has now taken stock. Ankara decided to be on the side of history. The zero problems approach has needed to end and it has, for all practical purposes, now ended. As a result, going forward, Turkey will put more emphasis on the human rights records of its neighbors, even if it imperils good relations with the incumbent leaders. Although Syria will be the first case study of this recalibrated policy, Iran will provide an even more difficult test.

## **An Increasingly Difficult Balancing Act With Iran**

Turkish-Iranian relations have long been dominated by the two countries' history of rivalry, stemming from rival imperial and religious ambitions. The Ottomans were the historic protectors of the Sunni faith and of Mecca and Medina. The Ottoman Sultan was deemed Caliph, which put the empire at odds with the Shi'i Saffavid Empire in modern-day Iran. The empires have a history of war and rivalry for control of major portions of the Middle East. However, the relations between the two empires, and their successor states, have been relatively stable since the signing of Kasr-ı Şirîn Treaty in 1639, which delineated Iran and Turkey's current border and granted control of the Iraqi territories to the Ottomans.

From 1979 until the late 1990s, Turkish officials viewed Iran with contempt because of the regime's alleged support for Islamic extremists seeking to overthrow Turkey's secular republic and Iran's alleged support for Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq and southern Turkey. Relations began to thaw after the two countries agreed to work together to combat Kurdish terrorism. The agreement coincided with the rise of the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK)—the Iranian branch of the PKK.

In contrast to Turkey's previous Iran policy, the AKP government publicly embraced the Islamic republic and sought ways to increase diplomatic and economic cooperation. The Turkish-Iranian relationship is today defined by a shared belief in non-interference, amicable neighborly relations, and economic and security cooperation. These principles have led the Turkish government to

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publicly proclaim its preference for dialogue and intense diplomacy to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis, meaning that Ankara has not been an enthusiastic supporter of the U.S. and European sanctions policy.

Ankara, however, remains very concerned about the possibility that Tehran may develop nuclear weapons. A nuclear-armed Iran would undermine regional stability, a bedrock principle of Turkey's foreign and security policy. Without a doubt, a nuclear-armed Iran would pose problems for Turkish foreign policy and regional ambitions. While Turkey does not feel directly threatened by Iran, a nuclear-armed Iran would certainly alter the balance of power and upset strategic stability. There is also the possibility that an Iranian nuclear weapon could prompt other states in the Gulf to take a series of steps to ensure their own security. The possibility of an arms race would seriously alter the region's landscape. Finally, Iran's nuclear program may lead to a military strike by Israel that targets a range of nuclear facilities on Iranian soil.

From the outset, Turkey and its Western allies agreed that Iran should not have nuclear weapons. However, Turkey's approach to convince Iran to be more cooperative differs from many of its traditional Western allies. Since 1979, the United States has generally pursued a coercive sanctions-based policy that seeks to isolate the Islamic republic. Though President Barack Obama has sought to invite Iran into direct dialogue, Iran has not accepted the offer of direct diplomacy. As a result, Washington reverted to its strategy of forcing behavioral change through the threat and finally the reality of sanctions. Turkey has taken the opposite approach, and believes that the levying of sanctions only serves to strengthen Iranian hardliners and has thus engaged directly with Iran on a number of diplomatic issues. Ankara has consistently argued that coercive sanctions are counterproductive because they encourage rash behavior. Moreover, there is a belief that sanctions are simply the prelude to military intervention by either the United States or Israel. The potential fallout from a military strike, the threat of the Middle East being sucked into a regional war, and the possibility that Turkey could be targeted by Iranian missiles in a counterstrike has strengthened Ankara's resolve to negotiate a settlement.

Given the stakes, it is clear that Turkey would never have sat idly on the sidelines while Western powers negotiated with Iran. Eventually in May 2010, Turkey and Brazil convinced Iran to sign a deal that would have Tehran send 1,200 kilograms of low enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey before being sent to Russia and France for further enrichment and fuel fabrication. In exchange, the Brazil, Iran, and Turkey joint declaration stipulated that Iran would receive 120 kilograms of uranium fuel for the Tehran research reactor. The Iran-Brazil-Turkey joint declaration was announced just days before the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed resolution 1929, which ratcheted up the sanctions against Iran for not answering International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) questions about its previous nuclear activities. Turkey and Brazil ultimately voted against the sanctions, believing they countered the spirit of the joint declaration and

undermined the trust earned by the agreement. Turkey's "no" vote seriously strained relations with the United States, which was counting on Ankara to support Washington's efforts to punish Iran for its nuclear intransigence. Since the signing of the joint declaration and the ensuing very public rebuke from many UNSC members, Turkey has changed tactics and once again assumed the role of facilitator, often acting as a conduit for messages from the West to Tehran and vice versa. In January 2011, diplomats from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, Russia, and Germany met their Iranian counterparts in Istanbul for discussions on the Iranian nuclear program. Turkey did not take part in the negotiations and only served as the host of the event. The next meeting between this group of the five permanent members of the UNSC plus Germany (P5+ 1) and Iran is also scheduled to take place in Turkey.

Given the stakes, Ankara will likely remain an active diplomatic partner in the West's quest to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis. Ankara will support UNSC sanctions but will leave the enforcement of unilateral American and European sanctions up to private Turkish businesses, despite the intense pressure to comply with these unilateral sanctions. Moreover, Ankara will remain staunchly opposed to any military action and will maintain that all avenues of diplomacy must be exhausted. However, the controversy surrounding the conclusion of the joint declaration by Turkey, Iran, and Brazil has prompted Ankara to change tactics and work behind the scenes to ensure that its interests are being maximized.

Clearly, the desire to be a regional power and exert greater influence over regional affairs has contributed to Ankara's position on Iran. Domestically, Turkey's own nascent civilian nuclear program has influenced its policy position. Under the third AKP government, Turkey will remain an active player on the Iran front and push its inclusive and non-coercive policy solutions to this very difficult problem.

Yet at the same time, Tehran may continue to test the international community's patience and Ankara's resolve to prioritize dialogue and engagement. It is not inconceivable for Ankara to eventually decide to abandon this path and reposition itself among the hardliners. New findings about Iran's covert nuclear activities could trigger such a policy reversal.

The aggravation of human rights violations within Iran or the degradation of the game of influence over the Syrian regime could also lead to such a fundamental reassessment. Ankara has been trying to nudge the Assad regime toward democratic reforms, whereas Tehran has been playing the opposite role, giving assurance to Assad. Moreover, Ankara's more principled response to the Arab revolts and its decision to clearly side with the democratic opposition is difficult to reconcile with its attitude toward Tehran. So far, Turkish policymakers have been adept at evading this conundrum. Gül was in Tehran in February 2011 at the peak of the protests held by the Green Movement. Similarly, the Turkish government was the first to congratulate Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad after his victory in an election marred by highly undemocratic

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practices. Under the third AKP government, Turkey will have to strike a different tone with the regime in Tehran if it is to retain its credibility in advocating reforms and democracy.

## The EU: A Vanishing Act

The EU dimension was conspicuously absent from Turkish electoral debates. Party leaders spoke about the challenges in Turkey's neighborhood, but rarely about the EU. This clearly indicates the widespread loss of interest in the EU accession process. The EU issue has become so remote that it was not even found worthy of politicking. Turkey-EU relations have indeed lost their momentum, and accession negotiations stalled during the AKP's last term. The Turkish electorate, however, has clearly not penalized the ruling party for this failure. Going forward, this can be taken as a sign that Turkey will continue with its current policy of hesitant engagement with Brussels. The political calculus in Ankara will be shaped by the outcome of upcoming elections in France and Germany in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Only the replacement of current Turkey skeptics with a new leadership that is more willing to open a place for Turkey in Europe can change the underlying dynamics of Turkish accession. The results of the recent elections have shown that this momentum will not be generated by a frustrated Turkish electorate.

The twin-track strategy devised to maintain a degree of momentum in the relationship has also met serious obstacles. The initiation of a dialogue with Turkey on visa facilitation and eventually liberalization was to ensure a positive engagement with Ankara. The European Commission, however, failed to receive a mandate from the EU member states to start this visa dialogue with Turkey. As a result, Turkey deferred the signature of a readmission agreement with the EU. Ankara is now awaiting a clear signal from Brussels that the path toward the long-term target of visa liberalization is clear of hurdles. Turkish diplomats highlight the paradoxical attitude of EU member states that, while they promise higher mobility for the people of the Southern Neighborhood in the revamped European Neighborhood Policy, they are incapable of taking even elementary steps for visa facilitation with Turkey.

The other element of the twin-track strategy was to initiate a strategic foreign policy dialogue between Ankara and Brussels. Indeed, the new regional backdrop, which creates a pressing need for meeting the challenges posed by the Arab Spring, might have facilitated an agreement for fostering a deeper and more comprehensive foreign policy dialogue between Turkey and the EU. Yet despite this obvious requirement, such a platform has still not emerged. Ankara submitted its own list of proposals in July 2010. The EU's reaction has been timid and devoid of ambition. After a year of inconclusive negotiations, Ankara is showing signs of losing interest in this initiative. The lack of progress in ensuring a cohesive EU response to the Arab world is undermining the

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value of the EU as a diplomatic counterpart for Ankara. Turkey's ambassador to the EU, Selim Kunalalp, remarked in an interview with the *EU Observer* that "the European Union has to adopt a common position on the Middle East if it wants to project its influence as the EU instead of as individual member states." Looking back at Israel's assault on the Gaza flotilla last year, he noted that, of the seven EU countries in the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, some voted against a flotilla resolution, some voted in favor of it, and others abstained. "I am sure that if there had been a fourth option, some of the member states would have taken it," he said.

The game changer, however, remains Cyprus. The lack of a settlement on the Cyprus question continues to hinder Turkey's accession path to the EU. Fourteen chapters are blocked due to the refusal of Turkey to open its ports to Greek Cypriot ships. UN-sponsored talks between the two communities on the island have now reached a critical stage. The UN secretary-general's roadmap gives the two leaders until October to scale down their differences. The secretary-general would then decide whether sufficient progress has been made to warrant the launch of an international peace conference before the end of the year. The peace conference on Cyprus would seal the deal and prepare the ground for the referendum to take place on the island in the first half of 2012. The deal would need to be adopted and ratified before the second half of 2012, when Cyprus takes over the EU presidency.

The settlement of the Cyprus problem would surely give a much-needed boost to the Turkey-EU relationship. It would also allow the settlement of the dispute between NATO and the EU on strategic cooperation. A further failure, following the ill-fated referendum on the Annan plan to settle the Cyprus dispute in 2004, would push Turkish policymakers to fundamentally reconsider their position. Under these circumstances, the AKP leadership would come under considerable pressure to push for the international recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, currently recognized only by Ankara. Such a reorientation of Turkish policy would seal the fate of the island as a divided state.

## The Rivalry With France

The outcome of Turkey's EU accession and even the feasibility of the establishment of a framework of cooperation to supplant the accession process is closely linked to the evolution of the country's relationship with France. The relationship between Paris and Ankara soured when President Nicolas Sarkozy came to power. He has been adamantly against Turkish accession to the EU. Instead, under his guidance, France offered to decouple the EU from its bilateral relationship with Turkey. The suggestion was to "agree to disagree" on the EU issue but to improve the bilateral relationship. Ankara was never receptive to this message and demonstrated that there will be political and economic costs for a state so intent on blocking Turkey's path to the EU. This modus vivendi held

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until the onset of the Arab uprisings. The negative equilibrium broke down with the Libyan crisis, when France decided to exclude Turkey from the list of invitees to the Paris conference on March 19, which established the ad-hoc coalition to enforce the no-fly zone over Libya. Sarkozy's decision not to invite Turkey showed how deep the rift between Paris and Ankara has grown.

Usually, acrimony in bilateral relations can be addressed through political dialogue and direct contacts between leaders, but reconciliation looks far away. Erdogan was furious about being frozen out of the Paris summit. Davutoglu insinuated that Paris was behind the anti-Turkish protests in Benghazi.

The rivalry could nonetheless extend beyond Libya. France is actively looking for new interlocutors in North Africa, a region in which it has huge political, economic, and energy interests as well as a long history. But, while France may have aspirations, the emerging political constituencies in Tunisia and Egypt find Turkey a more interesting model and a more appealing partner for their transition processes. Like France, Turkey has a difficult imperial legacy in the region, but it offers a successful combination of Muslim traditions, democracy, and rising prosperity. And, in Arab eyes, the dynamism of its economic growth compares favorably with crisis-ridden Europe's sluggishness.

The rivalry between Ankara and Paris also has an economic backdrop. The growth of Ankara's influence in the Middle East and North Africa may directly affect French economic interests. In Northern Africa particularly, the French economy had been able to carve out a zone of influence. The traditional model of market entry that relied on privileged relationships with the established authoritarian leadership is, however, fast becoming a liability. The democratization of the regimes and the ensuing pluralism of the political space are set to alter the dynamics and rules of foreign economic influence. This change of paradigm will present a particular challenge to France, the incumbent economic actor. The challenger is Turkey. Ankara will seek to capitalize on its enhanced image and capture an ever-growing share of the markets of Northern Africa and the Middle East.

The antagonism between Turkey and France can potentially undermine the cohesiveness and the effectiveness of the transatlantic security alliance and unravel the possibility of an institutionalized foreign policy cooperation between Turkey and the EU.

## **A Changing Power Relationship With Washington**

Under the third AKP government, the Turkey-U.S. relationship will be entering a new phase. The first deep transformation of the past decade had been due to the change in the regional security environment. As Turkey became less

concerned with threats to its territorial integrity, Ankara's reliance on the U.S. security umbrella started to decrease. This change allowed Turkey to acquire greater room for maneuver in its foreign policy. It also modified the nature of the Turkey-U.S. relationship, which became more oriented toward foreign policy cooperation and less toward Cold War–style, hard-security concerns. The dynamics of the relationship started to be shaped by the ongoing collaboration in Afghanistan and in Iraq. During this period, Ankara continued to welcome U.S. assistance for its EU bid and Washington's intervention to galvanize the international community for a settlement on Cyprus.

The third AKP era will witness another fundamental transformation of the relationship. The former set of parameters that defined the tune and the content of the relationship is becoming obsolete. The United States is pulling out of Iraq and is getting ready to pull out of Afghanistan in 2014. Osama bin Laden is dead and some say the war on terror is over. In the meantime, Turkey is also losing its zeal for EU accession.

The new set of parameters will be determined by the common aspiration to engineer the best Western policy response to the Arab revolts. The next phase of the Turkey-U.S. relationship will thus focus on a strategic collaboration in the Middle East. As a Muslim country and a NATO member with a growing influence in the region, Turkey is best placed to play the role of the regional partner for Washington. Ankara will become even more important in its role of a regional partner as the political climate in the Washington will force Obama to concentrate more on the U.S. economy and domestic issues in general. Under these conditions, America will necessarily have to rely more on its regional partners to pursue its foreign policy agenda. The need to engage or reengage regional partners is set to be one of the major impacts of the age of austerity on U.S. foreign policy. In the post-Iraq, post-Afghanistan phase, the U.S.-Turkey partnership will be shaped by the gradual emergence of a more comprehensive framework of political cooperation to foster the transition to democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. In the next couple of years, it will not be a surprise to witness U.S. support of Turkish civil society organizations' activities in the region. Likewise, Turkey can implement twinning programs for capacity building in Arab states with U.S. support.

The question of the Iranian nuclear program will not be a major area of disagreement. Although Ankara will remain an active player, it will focus on its role as a facilitator in the dispute. Ankara will at the same time seek a place at the table as a member of the negotiating group of the P5+1. If Tehran is able to develop nuclear weapons, Turkey will be a key country in ensuring a U.S.-led policy of Iranian containment.

The improvement in the Turkey-Israel relationship and a more visible Turkish role in the Middle East peace process will also help to ease the tension in the

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Turkey-U.S. relationship. In particular, the anti-Turkey sentiment in Congress will gradually diminish.

With its economy on the right path, its growing assurance as a foreign policy actor, and its belief that to achieve its foreign policy aims America needs Turkey as much as Turkey needs America, Ankara will seek a more balanced relationship with Washington.

## Re-Investing in a “New” NATO

Turkey joined NATO at the beginning of the Cold War for U.S. protection in case of a Soviet attack. At that time, Turkey was clearly on the front lines, but today all of that lies in the past and Turkey is pursuing its own assertive and independent foreign and security policy. Ankara’s new-found confidence naturally has consequences vis-à-vis NATO, for this growing assertiveness is testing the alliance’s cohesion, as is illustrated by a number of lingering issues and high-profile disputes.

NATO-EU cooperation has for some time been stalled because of the dispute over Cyprus, while—in sharp contrast to the majority of NATO members—Ankara maintains that Iran and Syria should not be viewed as threats to the alliance. And at the height of the Libyan crisis, while NATO officials were busy preparing operational plans, Turkey’s prime minister was speaking out against intervention in Libya.

As a result, some observers have even gone as far as to argue that Turkey is turning its back on the West. It would be more accurate, however, to say that Ankara is broadening its reach. Turkey may indeed cause tensions within NATO, but in reality its position is an astute balance between loyalty to the alliance and its own independence. Ankara’s aim is to assert its position in NATO and shape the transatlantic alliance so that it becomes an organization that more closely mirrors its own objectives.

NATO is for Ankara the primary political-military organization bridging the Atlantic. NATO’s privileged position is being consolidated as Turkey’s EU accession prospects grow ever more uncertain. Turkey will therefore be intent on scaling up the ambitions of NATO as a security provider in today’s world of complicated, new asymmetric threats. Turkey claims it was instrumental in NATO’s creation of its new Emerging Security Challenges division, and Ankara also pushed for NATO to acquire its own civilian crisis management capacity, reportedly in the face of strong resistance from France, which wanted the European Union to stay in the lead on this issue. The concession at NATO’s Lisbon summit last autumn to develop a “modest” civilian capability was seen as significantly bolstering Turkish policy goals.

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Another reason for Turkish willingness to upscale NATO's ambitions relates to economic realities. Unlike many of its Alliance partners, Turkey is not in austerity mode. Its growing economy and its strong fiscal performance has allowed Turkey to continue to invest in the modernization of its armed forces. The planned acquisition of new fighter planes, strategic airlift capabilities, and military helicopters is proceeding according to plan. The army is also gradually switching to a professional corps while decreasing its reliance on conscripts.

The next goal for Turkish policymakers will be to position NATO as an active player in the post-conflict and/or democracy-transition phase of the Arab world. Ankara will thus be in the vanguard of Alliance members arguing for the concrete engagement of NATO to help with the Arab world's transition process.

## **An Age of Unilateralism?**

The ambition set out by the AKP leadership and Davutoglu is to transform Turkey into a regional power. Describing the role of Ankara in the Middle East, Davutoglu speaks of an "order setter."<sup>21</sup> The transition from a compliant member of the transatlantic community to a regional power intent on assertively carrying out its own foreign policy agenda will, however, not be devoid of strains to the transatlantic relationship. In the next four years, this transition will be more evident and will be underpinned by a growing proclivity for unilateralism among Turkish policymakers.

Even though Turkey is a state with a long-standing tradition of diplomacy, the change in the level of ambition has unshackled the old thinking and introduced a new approach and a new set of goals for Turkish diplomacy. The status quo diplomacy of old is gradually but surely being replaced by a more activist and entrepreneurial vision, with all of the risks that such an approach may entail. Turkey thus feels compelled to rediscover the borders of its own influence and effectiveness as a foreign policy actor in the region and in the world. The desire to test the limits of Turkish "soft" power fuels the proclivity for unilateralism.

The upheavals in the Arab world and the emergence of a new political order in the region are also set to underpin this growing unilateralism. The AKP stands out as a role model for many of the new political parties of the Arab world. Already the Justice and Development Party in Morocco, Hamas in Palestine, former prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi's En-Nahda Party in Tunisia, and the Muslim Brotherhood are working to establish deeper ties with Turkey's ruling party. These ties constitute a parallel track to traditional Turkish diplomacy. It is really the first time that Turkey is seeking and is able to establish solid political-party-to-political-party ties with the Arab world. Unlike the U.S. experience with the International Republican Institute (IRI)

and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) or the German experience with the political foundations, Turkey in the past had no role to play in the game of cross-border political party cooperation. The opening of the political space and the emergence of new political actors in the Middle East represents such an opportunity for Turkey's ruling party. The AKP can become, even more than before, a "lead" institution in the region for assistance related to political party development. It is no coincidence that the AKP decided, for instance, to invite 100 youths from different countries in the region to witness the Turkish elections on June 12 in Istanbul. The institutionalization of the AKP's role may, on the one hand, help to increase Turkey's soft power in the region. On the other hand, the relationships nurtured through this political network are likely to be jealously guarded by the AKP leadership. These channels of informal diplomacy will be kept separate from the channels of formal diplomacy. The same will be true at the international level. As result, the more Turkey's ruling party gains influence in the region, the more an AKP-led Turkey will be tempted to do it alone.

The pull toward unilateralism is also due to Turkey's desire to be recognized among the world's emerging powers. In order to obtain this recognition, Turkey is ready to break away from the mold of the compliant member of the transatlantic community. When the United Kingdom recently approached Turkey to get Ankara's support to convince Brazil for a resolution to be introduced at the UN Security Council condemning the Syrian regime, Ankara stated its expectation to be consulted on the text of the resolution, acting almost as a virtual member of the UN Security Council. Despite pressure from EU member states, Turkey decided to run against Spain<sup>2</sup> for the seat allocated to the Western group for the UN Security Council in 2014. Ankara also decided to veto Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik's candidacy to the head of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The effectiveness of Turkey as a foreign policy actor under the third AKP government will ultimately depend on the ability of the country's leadership to aptly manage the tension between the proclivity for unilateralism and the proven benefits of multilateralism. That in turn will depend on the recovery from the age of discovery. The sooner Turkish policymakers discover the limits of unilateralism, the earlier the transition to an age of maturity in foreign policy will occur.

## Notes

- 1 For a more comprehensive evaluation of Turkish foreign policy see Sinan Ulgen, "A Place in the Sun or Fifteen Minutes of Fame: Understanding Turkey's Foreign Policy," Carnegie Europe Paper 1 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/turkey\\_new\\_foreign\\_policy.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/turkey_new_foreign_policy.pdf).
- 2 This is despite Spain being among the clearly pro-Turkey members of the EU and the co-chair of the UN-led "Alliance of Civilisations" with Turkey.

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